DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 110 188 PS 007 984

AUTHOR	Grow, Lucille J.; Shapiro, Deborah
TITLE	Transracial Adoption Today: Views of Adoptive Parents and Social Workers.
INSTITUTION	Child Welfare League of America, Inc., New York, N.Y.
SPONS AGENCY	Children's Bureau (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
REPORT NO	OCD-CB-59
PUB DATE	75
NOTE	103p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Child Welfare League of America, Inc., Research Center, 67 Irving Place, New York, New York 10003 (Paper, Publication A-38, $3.95 plus $0.40 postage and handling)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.76 HC-$5.70 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS	*Adoption; Agency Role; Child Rearing; Demography; Interviews; *Parent Attitudes; Parent Counseling; *Race Relations; *Racial Attitudes; Racial Factors; Social Agencies; *Social Workers
IDENTIFIERS	*Transracial Adoption

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the interaction of 38 pairs of white adoptive parents of black children and their social agencies, from the viewpoint of the parents and agency workers. A secondary study compared the characteristics of more recent transracial adopters with those of 125 families who had adopted transracially in the past. Results of questionnaires given to the 38 families and their social workers showed that families were generally well satisfied with their agency experiences. Discrepancies between reports of social workers and parents suggested that communication barriers existed and that many of the social workers had a somewhat limited understanding of the adoptive parents. The two sets of parents (present group and past group) were found to be fairly similar in terms of attitudes about transracial adoption and child rearing. Information obtained from interviews between social workers and parents is presented in addition to data on the demographic and social characteristics, motivation for adoption, and attitudes on racial issues of the adoptive families. A total of 155 adoption workers responded to an attitude questionnaire focusing on transracial adoption and related issues. In general, respondents agreed that transracial adoption was an acceptable practice and a better alternative for black children than indeterminate long-term foster care. (BT)

ED 110 188

TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION TODAY

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Views of Adoptive Parents and Social Workers

PS 007984

Lucille J. Grow
Deborah Shapiro

TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION TODAY

Views of Adoptive Parents and Social Workers

Report of a study
funded by grant
#OCD-CB-59 from the
Children's Bureau,
Office of Child Development,
United States Department
of Health, Education and
Welfare

Lucille J. Grow
Deborah Shapiro

RESEARCH CENTER
Child Welfare League of America, Inc.
67 Irving Place, New York, N.Y. 10003

A-38

00603

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Child Welfare League of America, Inc.

TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

© Copyright 1975 by the Child Welfare League of America, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing by the publisher, except by a reviewer, who may quote brief passages in a review.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 75-7553

ISBN Number: 0-87868-153-1

19664

CONTENTS

Preface. . . . . .Ann W. Shyne -i-

Part I. Parent-Worker Views on Transracial Adoption--Lucille J. Grow -1-

1 Introduction -1-

2 The Adoptive Families -4-

3 The Social Agency and the Adoptive Applicant -21-

4 Implications for Practice -41-

Part II. Adoption Staff Attitudes--Deborah Shapiro -47-

1 Population Characteristics -48-

2 The "Riskiness" of Transracial Adoption -50-

3 "Belonging" -56-

4 Eligibility Considerations -60-

5 Important Topics for Discussion With Adoptive Applicants -68-

6 Attitudes Toward Race Issues -74-

7 Summary and Implications -84-

00005

LIST OF TABLES

1-1	Parental Response on Development of Black Pride	13
1-2	Parental Role in Rearing a Black Child	14
1-3	Parents' Political-Social Attitudes	16
1-4	Factors Mentioned by Social Workers as Important in Adoptive Home Placement Decision	24
1-5	Social Workers' Comparisons of Current Adoptive Families With White Families Adopting Inracially	26
2-1	"Riskiness" of Transracial Adoption and Experience With Transracial Placement	55
2-2	"Riskiness" of Transracial Adoption and Place of Employment	56
2-3	"Belonging" by Age and Race	57
2-4	"Belonging" of White Infants, Black Infants, Black Toddlers and Race of Workers	58
2-5	"Belonging" of White Infants, Black Infants, Black Toddlers and Experience in Transracial Placements	59
2-6	"Belonging" of Adopted Children and Place of Employment	60
2-7	Eligibility Considerations Invoking Differential Response on White Inracial, Black Inracial and Transracial Adoption	63

10086

LIST OF TABLES (Continued)

2-8 Race of Worker and Importance of Socio-economic Factors in Transracial Adoption 65

2-9 Social Work Experience and Importance of Socioeconomic Factors in White Inracial Adoption 65

2-10 Adoption Experience and Importance of Psychological Factors in Transracial Adoption 66

2-11 Place of Employment and Importance of Psychological Factors in Adoption 67

2-12 Handling Child's Questions ... and Race of Worker 69

2-13 Handling Child's Questions ... and Social Work Experience 70

2-14 Reactions of Relatives...and Adoption Experience 71

2-15 Problems Specific to the Behavior... and Adoption Experience 71

2-16 Reactions of Neighbors...and Experience With Transracial Adoption 72

2-17 Physical Care and Emotional Nurturing... and Recent Transracial Placement Experience 73

2-18 Time of the Handling of the Child's Adoptive Status...and Agency Position 73

2-19 Importance of Parental Role and Age of Worker 79

19807

LIST OF TABLES (Continued)

2-20 Political-Social Attitudes and Race of Worker 79

2-21 Importance of Parental Role and Social Work Experience 80

2-22 Political-Social Attitudes and Adoption Experience 81

2-23 "Black Pride" and Experience With Trans-racial Adoption 81

2-24 Importance of Parental Role and Agency Position 82

2-25 "Black Pride," "Parental Role," "Political-Social Attitudes" ... and Place of Employment 83

PREFACE

The Research Center of the Child Welfare League of America recently completed a followup study of 125 adoptions of black children by white parents. This research, initiated in 1971, was concerned with the outcome of these adoptions, with special attention to the well-being of the child and his awareness of his racial heritage. The study focused on children who were at least 6 years old at followup and who had been in their adoptive homes for 3 years or longer. The children were in fact close to 9 years of age on the average, and had been in their adoptive homes over 7 years.

Staff of the Children's Bureau of the Office of Child Development, which funded the research, expressed interest not only in the outcome of transracial adoptions but in the experience of adoptive parents with social agencies. The passage of time since placement in the cases included in the followup, essential to any estimate of outcome, made these cases highly inappropriate for exploration of parent-worker interaction. Even if the parents' memories were accurate, and that is a very big "if," it would not have been possible to obtain parallel data from their workers. Furthermore, since considerable change in adoption practice is believed to have occurred over the years, such information as might be obtained about the agency experience of these parents would be of historic rather than current interest.

It was decided, therefore, to study the agency

00009

experience of families in the course of adopting. The views of the prospective adoptive parents and of their social workers were to be sought as soon as practicable after a child had been placed with them for adoption and at the completion of the adoption. To keep the logistic problems within bounds, this substudy of current transracial adoptions was to be conducted in the same communities where the main study was being carried out, and the same research interviewers--locally recruited experienced social workers--were to conduct the interviews for both studies. Because by 1972 adoptive placements of black children with white parents had become relatively uncommon in some of the communities selected for the followup, the substudy was confined to four of the seven areas. Although the time for accumulating the study group was extended from 6 months to nearly a year, only 38 cases were identified by the participating agencies in that time. The views of these parents and their social workers, together with information on the characteristics of the parents, are presented in Part I.

In addition to the parents and their workers, all professional adoption staff in the agencies were asked to complete questionnaires designed to elicit their attitudes and opinions about transracial adoption. The intent of this aspect of the study was to describe the climate of opinion in the agencies where the adoptions under study took place. As the responses were analyzed, it seemed to the research staff that they were of use in themselves in giving a picture of the attitudes of a substantial number of adoption workers on the important issue of adoption of black children by white parents. The data were therefore analyzed in detail and are presented as Part II of this report.

00010

The followup study, already published[1], indicated successful outcomes in about the same proportion of cases as have been found in other adoption followups, whether of normal white infants, older children, or children adopted transracially. Relatively little evidence was elicited of problems of confusion or denial of racial background in the children studied, most of whom were preadolescent. Success from the vantage points of child, parent, teacher and research interviewer showed only modest relation to any of the predictive factors examined.

The parents in the study of current transracial adoptions reported in Part I were similar in many respects to those in the followup study who had adopted several years earlier. Their most conspicuous difference was that they were considerably younger at the time of the adoptive placement, and the children placed with them were also younger. Although they expressed general satisfaction with their experience with the adoption agencies, they cited a number of problems with respect to policies, procedures and attitudes. These should provide useful leads for agencies interested in making their adoption practice as constructive an experience as possible for prospective adoptive parents. Similarly, the convergences and divergences of parent and worker perception of their interaction during the preplacement study and postplacement period suggest desirable practice modifications.

The general response of the social workers presented in Part II indicates a recognition of somewhat greater risk in transracial adoptions. However, the workers tended to see little difference in the charac-

---

1. Lucille J. Grow and Deborah Shapiro, Black Children--White Parents. New York, Child Welfare League of America, 1974.

00011

teristics of families appropriate to adopt inracially and transracially or in the matters to be considered in preparing adoptive parents for their parental role. Variations in opinion with training, experience and political-social attitudes may be relevant to staff development and to supervision of staff undertaking transracial adoptive placements.

The followup study and the current study were designed by the League's Research Director in consultation with research staff. Lucille J. Grow, the study director, was responsible for implementation of the design. She shared with Deborah Shapiro the analysis and presentation of findings of the followup. Responsibility for analysis and reporting of the current study was divided, with Dr. Grow focusing on the parent-social worker material presented as Part I, and Dr. Shapiro concentrating on the social worker attitude survey, which appears as Part II. As research assistant, Eva Russo carried the detail work of data processing. Karen Brown and Anne Moses facilitated the research by handling the extensive correspondence involved in the field operation as well as typing the report.

We should like to thank the agencies that furnished cases for the study, their staff who participated, and the research staff who interviewed the families. Following are the agencies and the interviewers for families who adopted in each of the four areas.

Boston Area
Boston Children's Service Association
Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Public Welfare
Elizabeth Johnson
Michael Meleedy
Louise Saltus
Nancy Woodfork

Los Angeles Area
County of Los Angeles, Department of Adoptions
Ethel Branham
Marilyn Horn

Minneapolis-St. Paul Area
Children's Home Society of Minnesota
Hennepin County Welfare Department
Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota
Social Services Division, County Welfare Department,
City of St. Paul and County of Ramsey
Sandra Alberg
Nicky Bredeson
Judy Karon

Seattle Area
Catholic Children's Services
Medina Children's Service
Margaret Daughters
Connie Hansen
Bernadette Smetka
Martha Steinmetz

On behalf of the Child Welfare League of America and of readers who find this report of use, we express appreciation also to the families and individual social workers who contributed the data and to the Children's Bureau in the Office of Child Development, which made the research possible.

Ann W. Shyne
Director of Research

39013

PART I. PARENT-WORKER VIEWS ON TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION

1. Introduction

This study of white families with whom black children were placed for adoption in 1972-73 was conducted simultaneously with a larger followup study of children adopted transracially several years earlier. The principal purpose was to examine the experience of adoptive parents with social agencies from the point of view of the parents and the agency workers. A secondary purpose was to compare the characteristics of more recent transracial adopters with those of families who had adopted transracially in the past.

The families who participated in this study were adopting children through social agencies in Boston, Los Angeles, Minneapolis-St. Paul and Seattle--agencies that had also participated in the larger study. The families were to be interviewed and information was to be obtained from their social workers shortly after the children were placed and again after the adoption was made final, or the child was returned to the agency, or, if neither of these had occurred, approximately a year after the placement. To gain some sense of the attitudes about transracial adoption prevalent in the agencies where these adoptions took place, all professional adoption staff were asked to complete a questionnaire. Their responses are presented in Part II of this monograph.

Recruitment of social agencies to enlist the family's cooperation in participating in this study commenced in the early summer of 1972. Communication with the

agencies in the seven areas in which the larger study was being conducted indicated that in these areas, which had pioneered in this type of transracial adoption, the volume of such placements had begun to decrease considerably. The four areas selected for the substudy had experienced less decrease than the others, and seemed likely to yield 50 or 60 families over a 6-month period. During the approximately 12 months, however, only nine of the 15 adoption agencies in these four cities reported any transracial adoptions, and they were able to furnish us with the names and addresses of only 38 families--Minneapolis-St. Paul, 19; Seattle, nine; Boston, seven; and Los Angeles, three.

Using a semistructured interview schedule, the research interviewers who had staffed the main study interviewed each of the couples in their home. The interviews, averaging about 2 hours, covered such areas as the general living situation and socioeconomic characteristics of the family, their contact with family and friends, their preparation for and experience to date with the adoption, and their experience with the social agency in reference to the adoption. At the close of the interview each parent also completed a questionnaire directed mainly to obtaining further information on the views of the parents about their experience with the social agency.

In the second parent interview, averaging about $1\frac{1}{4}$ hours, inquiry was made into changes that had occurred between the two interviews, the sociopolitical opinions of the neighbors and the adoptive parents, and the family's further experience with the social agency. At the end of the interview the parents were again asked to complete individual questionnaires designed chiefly to elicit their attitudes on racial issues.

At the end of each interview with the parents, the research interviewer completed a schedule giving her

19915

or his assessment of them. The family's social worker also was asked to complete a schedule that contained questions similar to those covered either in the parental interview or the parent questionnaire, and that also explored the factors in the worker's decision to make the adoptive placement.

Thirty-eight couples participated in the first joint interviews (Time 1) and each parent completed the parent questionnaire. Social worker questionnaires were also completed on each case. At Time 2 all of the families were re-interviewed except two who had moved to points so distant that it was not feasible to reach them even by telephone, and one family who refused for unspecified reasons. Of the 35 families reached, one couple had divorced and a second couple had separated, with the mother, in one instance, and the father, in the other, caring for the adopted child. Thus, 34 mothers and 34 fathers participated in the interviews and completed the questionnaire. Social workers' questionnaires were also received on 34 families. Of the 35 interviews, 10 took place less than 9 months after the family was first seen, 21 occurred between 9 months and a year after the first interviews, and the remaining four families were re-interviewed more than a year later.

At the time of the second interview, the adoptions had been completed on 25 of the 35 children. The time from adoptive placement to legal completion of the adoption ranged from $5\frac{1}{2}$ months to slightly more than 12 months, with 8.9 months the median. In eight other instances postplacement supervision had been formally completed and the adoption had been approved by the agency, but was awaiting court action. In one case postplacement supervision was incomplete, but adoption appeared likely according to the supervising social worker. In one case, the child had been returned to the agency, but for reasons seemingly

00016

unrelated to the child's racial background.

The next section presents data on the demographic and social characteristics of the adoptive families, their motivation for the adoption, and their attitudes on racial issues, and concludes with some comparison with families in the followup. Section 3 is concerned with the social workers' perceptions of the adoptive parents and the parents' perceptions of their general experience with the agency.

2. The Adoptive Families

Demographic and Social Characteristics

At the time the adoptive child was placed in their home, the median age of the mothers was 28.8 years and of the fathers, 30.0. In only one case were both parents under 25 years of age and in only three were both 35 or older.

Three-fourths of the parents had been married at least 5 years, with 6 years the median length of time the 38 couples had been married. Nineteen of the families had biological children, and 11 families had already adopted another child, usually a black child. In every instance the child currently being placed was younger than the biological or other adopted children.

Twenty-two of the mothers and 29 of the fathers were college graduates. Five mothers and 14 fathers held postgraduate degrees and four other fathers were attending graduate school. Only one mother and one father had not completed high school.

Ten of the mothers were employed outside the home, all but two in professional positions. Thirty-one of the

10017

fathers were in professional or managerial positions. The annual family incomes ranged from under $5000 (three families) to over $20,000 (10 families); the median income was $12,813.

About half the mothers and fathers were Protestant. Catholics composed the next largest denominational group--nine mothers and seven fathers. Two families were Jewish and the rest--nine mothers and 10 fathers--had no religious affiliation. Of those reporting a religion, about two-fifths said they attend religious services infrequently or never.

At the time of the child's placement the families, with only one exception, consisted of the parents and one or more children. Family size ranged from three to seven, and the average number of persons in the household was 4.1.

Life Style and Attitudes

The median length of time the families had been living in their present neighborhoods when the child entered the home was 2.6 years. The vast majority (33 families) described their neighborhoods as predominantly or totally white. Only five families, all living in white neighborhoods, described their neighbors as not particularly friendly, and four families reported having no social interaction with neighbors.

At the second interview (Time 2), when the parents were asked about the social and political views and racial attitudes of their neighbors, 19 of the 33 families who responded described their neighbors as fairly liberal, but about the same number believed their neighbors had voted for Nixon in the 1972 presidential election. As to the racial attitudes of neighbors, two-thirds of the parents felt their neighbors would approve of black families or more

black families moving into the neighborhood, and of school busing to further integration.

Seven mothers and 12 fathers reported that they were not "close" to any members of their extended family. Less than half the parents had relatives who lived in the vicinity, and only 19 mothers and 20 fathers reported seeing their extended families as frequently as once a month. However, 21 mothers and 18 fathers reported having many close friends and acquaintances, and 24 of the families visited with friends at least weekly. Thirty-one families had black friends or acquaintances, and 25 of the families socialized with their black friends in each other's homes.

Although few families participated in any organizational activities concerned with social change, 28 of the mothers and 31 of the fathers described themselves as liberal or extremely liberal in their political and social views. When, in the second interview, we asked the parents which political party they favored, about three-fourths said they preferred the Democratic or Liberal party. With few exceptions the families reported having voted for McGovern in the 1972 presidential election. Thus, they are considerably more liberal than they view their neighbors to be.

We were interested in learning something about the behavior these parents would expect from their child. Each parent, therefore, was asked to respond to a list of items, indicating the degree of importance attached to each. Included were such items as children's obeying when told to do something, whether children should defend their rights by fighting back, whether they should be free to express disagreement with parents or other adults, and the like. An index of parental permissiveness developed for the follow-

19919

up study was used. It has a possible range of scores from 8 to 32, with high scores denoting permissiveness. The scores recorded ranged from 14 to 27 for the mothers and 14 to 26 for the fathers, with the mothers having a median score of 19.3 and the fathers 18.5. On the basis of the score categories developed for the followup, six mothers and four fathers with scores below 17 were strict or expected considerable conformity from their child; 11 mothers and 15 fathers, scoring 17 or 18, were "moderate;" and just over half the parents--21 mothers and 19 fathers--scoring 19 or higher, were permissive.

Adoption Motivation and Preferences

During the first interview the couples were asked why they had decided to adopt a child, and why they had decided to adopt transracially. For half of the families the reason for adoption was either infertility or fear of another pregnancy. Only 11 families mentioned social motivations, such as wanting children but not wishing to add to the "population explosion" or being concerned about children without homes. The remaining eight families thought of adoption as a means of obtaining a child of a desired sex or age, or to provide companionship for their child.

Fourteen families had reached the decision to adopt transracially because they wished to provide a home to a needy child, or because they felt that the addition of a black child to their home would benefit the entire family. On the other hand, there were 12 families whose decision was a matter of "second choice"--that is, there were no white children available, or they had been assured that the adopted child would not appear too different from them. The other nine families who gave a reason stressed that they just wanted a child and for them race was not important.

10020

Only five families said someone else had suggested that they adopt transracially, and in each instance the person who made the suggestion was an agency social worker. Twelve other families had friends who had adopted transracially. Usually--in 26 instances--the couple felt that they had arrived at the decision simultaneously, although in 11 cases the wife had been the first to consider the possibility and in one case, the husband.

When queried about the racial or ethnic background of children they would consider adopting, all but one of the mothers said they would have adopted easily an American Indian, Mexican-American or Puerto Rican child, and all but four mothers said they would have readily adopted an Oriental child. The fathers indicated slightly less openness, but their reservations were usually minor. Relatively few mothers or fathers, however, would have found it easy to adopt a child with a noncorrectable handicap such as blindness or deafness, a child with mental illness in her or his immediate background, a retarded child, or a normal child 8 years of age or older.

In most instances in which there were other children in the family who were believed old enough to understand, the parents had prepared them for the introduction of a black child into the home. In most families the idea of adopting a black child was reported as being anticipated with pleasure.

When they first began thinking about adoption in general, all but eight of the families had in mind the age of the child they wished to adopt. Seven families wanted an infant under 3 months old, and 12 others had been thinking of a baby under 1 year. Only seven families had considered adopting a child 3 years old or older. When asked whether they had had any particular expectations about the racial background of the child,

00021

almost half the families responded in the negative. Thirteen other families specifically wanted a child of black parents or with one black parent, several others spoke of simply wanting a "mixed" or "interracial" child, and one family had been thinking of adopting a white child.

The children eventually placed with these families--19 girls and 19 boys--were, on the average, younger than the parents had had in mind, with 28 of them less than 1 year old, including 18 infants under 3 months. Only one child was over 3 years at the time of the adoptive placement. The median age at placement was 3.5 months.

Most of the children (29) had one black parent. In seven instances both parents were black, and in two the racial background of the child's biological parents was not known to the family. Only six of the children were described by their parents as having medium or dark brown complexions, but 26 children were said to have other Negroid characteristics, and most were reported to be strikingly different in appearance from the adoptive parents. Twenty of the families reported that the child's appearance had prompted comment from others, and 25 families said that strangers had stared at them because of the child's looking different from them. In general the parents reacted with amusement to strangers' stares.

Reservations About Transracial Adoption

Once the parents had decided to adopt transracially, did they have any reservations about it? Did they tell their relatives and neighbors of the plan? If so, what were the reactions? In more than two-fifths of the families both wife and husband were concerned about their extended family's reaction to a transracial adoption, how the neighborhood children would treat the child, and whether a black child would be happy with

00022

white parents. A few more husbands than wives expressed reservations about feeling like a parent to an adopted child and to an adopted child of a different race, and about how a black child would fit into their family. On the other hand, a few more wives than husbands had reservations about whether the child would be happy in their home and about how their extended family would react to the fact that they were adopting.

The initial reactions of the extended family to the transracial adoption were mixed, but in most cases the opposition of relatives dissipated after the placement. One set of parents had not shared information about their child's racial background with their family, as they wanted their relatives to accept the child as an individual, with the racial background only one aspect to be handled in time. Among the other families, the initial reaction of the mother's family was usually more positive than that of the father's family, with 24 of the mothers reporting that all of their relatives were supportive from the beginning, in contrast to only 16 of the fathers reporting such a reaction. In those instances in which the relatives had not been accepting, most of the parents, and particularly the fathers, felt that this lack of support would not have been evident had the child been white. Most of the parents believed that the attitudes of their extended families about the adoption had not affected their own relationship with them. Where these attitudes did make a difference, it was as likely to have positive as negative effects.

Prior to the child's placement in their home, in every instance the parents had shared their plans with some or all of their friends, and without exception the friends had been supportive. Two-thirds of the families had also talked with neighbors about their plans, although somewhat fewer of the parents said that their

19923

neighbors' opinions about blacks and about transracial adoptions were important to them. While the neighbors were usually receptive to the idea of the couple's adopting transracially, five families reported that neighbors had questioned it and three other families reported opposition by some of their neighbors.

Parental Sensitivity to Racial Issues in Adoption

The adoptive parents differed widely in their knowledge of the experience of other transracially adopting parents. Nine families had been or were currently members of a transracial adoption group, and six other families had attended meetings. Others had friends who had also adopted transracially, but 13 families reported no exposure either to transracial adoption groups or to other families who had adopted children across racial lines.

At Time 1 the seven sets of parents whose adopted child was at least 2 years old at placement were asked whether their child was aware of her or his black parentage. Even though four of these children had knowledge of their adopted status, only one child--the oldest youngster placed--had knowledge of his black heritage. By Time 2, five of the nine children who were by then 2 years of age or older had this information.

All but five sets of parents believed that their child would eventually encounter difficulties due to racial background. Most frequently anticipated--mentioned by 17 families--were problems in interpersonal relations, including difficulties relating to peer relations, dating and marriage. Fifteen of the families expressed concern about the child's possible confusion about herself or himself as a person--that is, the child's identity. The general problems of prejudice

19024

and discrimination were mentioned by eight families.

Even though most of the parents anticipated that their child would encounter problems because of racial background, 24 of the 35 families responded in the negative when asked at Time 2 whether there was anything one does differently in rearing a black child from what one does in rearing a white child. The families who responded in the affirmative alluded most frequently to the need to emphasize black culture, to encourage their child's identification with blacks, and to alert their child to racial prejudice and discrimination. One family spoke of the need to develop special skills and a high degree of independence in their racially mixed child.

At Time 2 seven of the 35 families reported that they were having more contact with other blacks as a result of the transracial adoption. In addition, six families said they had become more involved or personally invested in racial issues, and four others felt that this adoption had increased their awareness or understanding of what racism means.

During the Time 2 interviews each parent was asked to indicate whether in today's climate four specific types of transracial adoptions should be encouraged or discouraged. The majority--31 of the mothers and 28 of the fathers--would encourage the adoption by black and by white families of children of mixed black and white ancestry. The remaining parents were unsure. The parents showed more opposition toward and also less certainty about white families' adopting children with two black parents and about black families' adopting children with two white parents. However, 24 mothers and 21 fathers would encourage the former type of adoption, and almost as many--22 mothers and 20 fathers--indicated a favorable attitude toward the second type. The other mothers were equally divided

betwe n those opposed and those unsure about such adoptions, with the fathers likely to express themselves as unsure.

Parental Attitudes Toward Blacks

On the questionnaire given the parents at the ti e of the second interview each parent was asked to check agreement or disagreement with a series of statements that had been used in the followup study and in the general survey of social worker attitudes toward transracial adoption.

Three statements were intended to measure the parents' attitudes about the necessity for helping their black child develop black pride. (See Table 1-1.)

Table 1-1

Parental Response on Development of Black Pride
N=34

	Number Agreeing	
	Mothers	Fathers
It is very important for a black child to develop pride in her/ his black heritage.	33	32
Parents should make their black child aware of contributions of such black leaders as Stokely Carmichael, Malcolm X and Eldredge Cleaver.	30	33
Black children adopted by white families should be helped to acquire a feeling of identity with the black community.	29	30

00026

From 29 to 33 of the 34 mothers who completed this questionnaire agreed with each of these statements, as did 30 to 33 of the 34 fathers. Thus the responses of most of these parents indicated a high awareness of the importance of helping the child positively with his racial heritage.

The second set of statements was directed toward parental attitudes regarding their role in rearing a black child. (See Table 1-2.)

Table 1-2

Parental Role in Rearing a Black Child
N=34

	Mothers	Fathers
	Number Agreeing	
It is essential that white families who adopt transracially have or acquire black friends.	22	20
A black child reared by white parents is likely to have problems in developing a sense of identity.	14[a]	18
	Number Disagreeing	
The tasks that parents have in rearing a black child are no different from those of parents rearing a white child.	19	22
A black child is sufficiently prepared for adulthood if given love and security by white adoptive parents.	15	18

a. N=33

19927

Twenty-two of the mothers and 20 of the fathers agreed with the statement that it is essential that white families who adopt transracially have or acquire black friends. In addition, a majority of the parents--19 mothers and 22 fathers--indicated a consciousness of a difference between transracial adoption and inracial adoption by disagreeing with the statement that the tasks of parents in rearing a black child are no different from those of parents rearing a white child. There was far less consensus on the other two statements, particularly among the mothers. Fifteen mothers and 18 fathers disagreed with the statement that a black child is sufficiently prepared for childhood if given love and security by white adoptive parents. Fourteen mothers and 18 fathers agreed that a black child reared by white parents is likely to have problems in developing a sense of identity. It is likely that these four statements, and particularly the last two, reflect some of the ambiguities that confront parents in rearing a child of a different race, ambiguities probably intensified by societal attitudes.

Fourteen statements dealt with the parent's political-social attitudes. The responses indicate that the majority of the parents have a relatively high degree of political and social consciousness. (See Table 1-3.)

10028

Table 1-3

Parents' Political-Social Attitudes

N=34

	Mothers	Fathers
	Number Agreeing	
*Our government isn't doing as much as it can to provide opportunities for minority groups.	25	25
Blacks are not to blame for the fact that so many of them are poor.	26	29
White students should take courses in black history and black culture.	33	28
	Number Disagreeing	
*Many of the black groups today are pushing for too much change too quickly.	31	32
Today's blacks should take heart from our immigrant groups who got ahead by working hard and by saving.	27[a]	25
*Most of the complaints today about racial inequality are not justified by the facts.	30	30
A poor white youth will have as much trouble getting ahead as will a poor black youth.	27	28

Table 1-3 continued

	Mothers Number Disagreeing	Fathers
*There is far too much emphasis today on racial equality.	31[b]	31
Most of today's black leaders are "pushy" and overdemanding.	32	31
*America has always been a land of opportunity for those who really want to get ahead.	26	22
*The reason so many blacks are on welfare is because they do not know how to manage their lives properly.	29	29
*Our administration is doing a great deal to equalize opportunities for all races.	23	28
Racism does not affect my life very much.	20	25
*Blacks and other minority groups expect too great a change in too short a time.	34	32

a. N=32
b. N=33
* Items used in index of "black pride" in Part II.

00030

Comparisons With Families in the Followup Study

Although these families were in general much like the families in the followup study, there were differences. Some of the differences seem worth noting, though small enough to have occurred by chance in samples of this size. Some that are large enough to be statistically significant may be because respondents in this study were reporting current or recent perceptions, while respondents in the followup were asked to recall attitudes and perceptions they held several years earlier.

On the average, the 38 sets of parents were younger at the time of the child's placement, having median ages of 28.8 years and 30.0 years for the mothers and the fathers, respectively, versus 34.0 and 36.7 for the mothers and the fathers in the followup study. Proportionately fewer had biological children--50% versus 70%--a difference possibly accounted for by their younger age. Although fairly equal proportions of the families in the two studies had other adopted children, of those who had, a much larger proportion of the parents in the current study had adopted other children who were also black--82% versus 57%.

Although the education and occupational backgrounds of the parents were fairly comparable, a smaller proportion of the mothers in the current study were employed outside the home--26% versus 40%. This and their younger age undoubtedly account for their lower median family income--$12,813 versus $15,700.

Proportionately fewer of the families had a religious affiliation. Proportionately fewer had relatives living in the area, but more of both the mothers and fathers reported having close affectional ties with their relatives. Although there was no difference between the fathers in the two studies, these younger mothers tended to see their relatives less frequently,

10031

with only half of them reporting contact with relatives at least once a month, versus two-thirds of the mothers in the followup study. On the other hand, the families in the current study led more active social lives, as indicated by the frequency of entertaining or visiting friends.

The majority of families in both studies lived in predominantly or totally white neighborhoods, but a larger proportion of these younger families viewed their neighbors as liberal, as approving of more black families moving into their neighborhoods, and particularly of busing black children into the neighborhood.

Proportionately more of the parents in the current study described themselves as voting a Democratic or Liberal ticket, and more of these fathers described themselves as liberal in their political and social views. This more liberal stance was evident in the parents' response to statements on the questionnaire dealing with attitudes on race-related political and social issues. On all but one of the statements the responses of the parents in the current adoption study showed greater awareness of political and social problems, and some of the differences were statistically significant.

These parents may have had an earlier exposure to racist attitudes and discriminatory practices than was the case for parents in the followup study. This is suggested by the fact that 82% of the families in the current study reported having had black friends or acquaintances prior to this adoption, as compared with only 53% of the families who had adopted earlier.

In view of the reported decrease in need for adoptive homes for infants and the corresponding need for homes for older children, it was surprising to find that three-fourths (74%) of the children in the current adoption study were under 1 year of age at placement,

10032

in contrast to only 43% of the children in the followup study. The median age at placement for children in the current study was 3.5 months, in contrast to 13.9 months for the children in the followup study. The explanation may lie in the lower age of the parents and in the fact that proportionately more families in the current study preferred an infant under 1 year of age--50% versus 19%.

The families in the current study more often reported their reason for considering adoption as infertility or fear of becoming pregnant (50% versus 38%), and significantly more often recognized adopting transracially as a "second choice." Thirty-two percent would have preferred a white child were one available, in contrast to 12% of the families in the followup study. The families in the current study had also had more exposure to others who had adopted transracially, with 32% of those reporting that they had friends or acquaintances who had so adopted, in contrast to 12% of the families in the followup study, a difference also statistically significant.

On those items dealing with the kind of atypical child the parents would have considered adopting, no particular difference was found in the responses of the mothers in the two studies. However, a significantly smaller proportion of the fathers in the current adoption study, as compared with the fathers in the followup study--5% versus 32%--would have considered a normal child 8 years of age or older.

With one exception, the parents in the two studies were fairly similar in the reservations they had about adopting transracially. A higher proportion of the parents in the current adoption study had reservations about whether a black child would be happy in their home. The difference between the two groups of mothers on this (66% versus 40%) was statistically significant. The explanation may be that these are still new adoptive parents. The parents in the followup may have

4433

forgotten such concern prior to adoption. The difference in length of experience may also account for the somewhat larger proportion of the current adopters anticipating that their child would encounter problems due to racial background--87% of the current adopters, in contrast to 67% in the followup study. On the other hand, since the current adopters indicated a higher degree of political-social consciousness, their greater pessimism may reflect more awareness of potential problems.

The one other measure on which the parents in the two groups were different was in their expectation regarding their child's conformity in behavior. Fewer mothers and significantly fewer fathers in the current study were categorized as strict.

3. The Social Agency and the Adoptive Applicant

With four exceptions the study child was placed with the family by the agency to which they had first applied. One family had been transferred from another agency that terminated its adoption service. Three families were rejected by the first agency, one because of a religious requirement, one because of agency policy regarding the minimal time a couple had to be married and proof of infertility, and a third for reasons unknown. The length of time between application to the agency making the placement and placement of the child in the home ranged from less than 1 month for one family to over 2 years for another family. Of the 37 placements for which we have information, five were made within 6 months after application, 22 were made between 6 and 12 months later, and the remaining 10 occurred a year or more after the family had applied. The median time was 9.6 months.

This section describes the social workers who represented the agency to the adoptive applicants, their perceptions of the applicants, and the nature of the prep[illegible]cement

and the postplacement contacts as viewed by applicant and worker.

Information about the social workers and their views was obtained through two questionnaires. One was sent to the worker with major responsibility for the preplacement study as soon as the agency notified us of a child's placement with the family. Thirty-seven of the 38 questionnaires were returned. When we were notified that the adoption had been completed or the child returned to the agency, or approximately a year after the child's placement in the home, a second questionnaire was sent to the social worker with responsibility for the family during the postplacement period. These questionnaires were returned on 34 of the 35 families interviewed at Time 2.

Characteristics of the Social Workers

The family's social worker was usually a white woman who was or had been married. Half the families had workers between the ages of 25 and 45. Only one family had a social worker under 25 years of age and eight, a worker 55 years of age or older. The worker usually had a master's degree in social work, and, if not, in most instances was taking or had taken some graduate social work courses. Usually the worker was classified as a caseworker, although a case aide was assigned to one family and supervisors were assigned to seven families.

The family's worker usually had had considerable social work experience. Only two families had social workers with less than 3 years' experience, and 22 families had workers with 10 years or more of social work experience. The worker had been making adoptive placements for anywhere from 1 to more than 10 years, and 20 families had social workers with a minimum of 5 years of adoption experience. Twenty-four families

10835

had workers with considerable experience in placing black children in white homes, having arranged at least six such transracial adoptive placements, but in two instances the family's worker had had no such experience.

The Social Workers' Perceptions of the Adoptive Families

The worker was asked to designate each item on a list of 15 items that was a factor in the decision to place this particular child with these parents. This section of the questionnaire was completed on 35 families. (See Table 1-4.)

The factors most frequently checked were, in descending order, the family's positive motivation for transracial adoption, their ability to allow a child to accept her or his racial identity, and their sincere desire to give a child a home. The factors least frequently checked as being of importance were that no white child was available for the family, that the child was exceptionally good-natured and appealing, and that the child's parental background was above average or superior. The family's inability to adopt inracially because of their age or other characteristics was not checked at all.

The workers were also asked to indicate the three most important items in each decision. What the family, rather than the child, had to offer was the predominant factor in the priority they gave to the various items. In 11 instances the family's positive motivation for transracial adoption was ranked as the most important factor in the social worker's decision. Another motivational aspect--the family's sincere desire to give a child a home--was ranked as most important in decisions to place the children in six of the families. The three other factors checked as the primary reason for making the placement in at least three families were concerned more directly with family strengths: the family's

00036

Table 1-4

Factors Mentioned by Social Workers as Important in Adoptive Home Placement Decision

N=35

	Total	Priority 1st	Priority 2nd	Priority 3rd	Not Priority
Positive motivation regarding transracial adoption	32	11	6	6	9
Ability to allow a child to accept her/his racial identity	30	3	7	8	12
Family's sincere desire to give a child a home	27	6	3	5	13
Superior ability to provide a healthy, emotional climate	22	5	6	1	10
Highly stable and mature family	20	4	5	2	9
Special strengths of this family for risk taking	15	2	3	--	10
Family's conviction that racial differences are of little importance	15	--	1	4	10
Family's ability to withstand possible community criticism	14	--	1	3	10
Family's positive relationship with blacks	10	1	2	--	7
High intellectual potential of child	7	2	1	1	3
Family's high level of tolerance for frustration	7	--	--	1	6
Above-average or superior parental background of child	5	--	--	1	4
Exceptionally good-natured and appealing child	4	--	--	2	2
No white child available for family	1	1	--	--	--
Not eligible for adoption in-racially because of age or other characteristics	--	--	--	--	--

10037

superior ability to provide a healthy emotional climate, cited in five families; the parents' health and maturity, in four families; and the family's ability to allow a child to accept her or his racial identity, noted in three cases.

From the workers' viewpoints, how do these families stand in relation to white adoptive families who have adopted inracially? To answer this question the workers were given a list of 20 items considered to have some relevance in determining a family's eligibility, and asked to check on each item whether the particular family was "superior to other families," "about the same," or "somewhat below other families" with whom they had recently placed white children. The items dealt with the families' socio-economic status, social interaction, personal adjustment, attitudinal factors relevant to this adoption, ability or capacity to function in a parenting role, and interaction with the social agency. A score of 3 was given for a rating of "superior," 2 for a rating of "the same" as other families, and 1 for a rating of "below." Thus a score of 2.0 would signify that a family was about the same as others with whom white children had been placed. A mean score was obtained for each of the six major areas covered.

10038

Table 1-5

Social Workers' Comparisons of Current Adoptive Families With White Families Adopting Inracially
N=37

Items	Score	Families' Rating as Compared With Other Families: Superior	Same	Below	N.R.
Socioeconomic Status	2.22				
Income, occupation, education, housing		14	17	6	-
Standing of family in community		9	26	1	1
Social Interaction	2.22				
Relationship to extended family		8	23	6	-
Contact with minority group members		18	16	3	-
Relationship to neighbors		4	29	3	1
Depth and extent of friendships		14	22	-	1
Personal Adjustment	2.49				
Quality of marital relationship		17	20	-	-
Emotional maturity		20	16	1	-
Current life adjustment		16	20	1	-
Ability to cope with problems, frustrations and disappointments		21	16	-	-
Attitudinal Factors	2.49				
Motivation for adopting		17	20	-	-
Attitude toward unmarried parents		14	23	-	-
Attitude toward children born out of wedlock		14	23	-	-
Degree of social concern		27	10	-	-
Ease of handling with child fact of adoptive status		19	18	-	-
Parental Role	2.66				
Capacity to love child for her or his own sake		23	13	1	-
Ability to let a child develop in own way and at own pace		24	13	-	-
Degree of sensitivity, understanding, tolerance for children's difficulties		30	7	-	-
Potential for care, guidance and protection of children		22	15	-	-
Interaction With Social Agency	2.35				
Ability to work successfully with agency		15	20	2	-

10439

As may be seen from Table 1-5, these families compared favorably with families recently adopting white children. Only on items concerned with the family's socioeconomic status, their social interaction, and their interaction with the social agency were more than one family rated as below average. Even in these instances more families were rated superior than were rated below average. Indeed, on several items within these areas more families were rated as superior than as average or below.

Even on socioeconomic status and social interaction, the two areas on which the families as a group scored lowest, the mean score of 2.22 indicates that they were rated somewhat above average. Their ability to work successfully with the agency--that is, their interaction with the social agency--received the next lowest score--2.35. The parents' attitudes and their personal adjustment received scores of 2.49. The parents were rated highest on their capacity for parenting, where their mean score of 2.66 indicates that the social workers considered these families to be generally well above families with whom they had placed white children.

At Time 1 the social worker was asked to estimate how long it would take until the parents felt that the child was their own child. Most of the parents were expected to feel that way within a month of placement. The workers believed 14 mothers and 16 fathers had this feeling immediately at placement, and that 18 other mothers and 16 other fathers had it within the first month. Of the remaining 10 parents, seven were expected to feel that the adoptive child was their own within the first 6 months, and the remaining three within a year following placement.

In three areas data are available from the social worker comparable with that presented in Section 2 on the parents--motivation for adoption, types of chil-

10040

dren who would be acceptable, and the family's rating on strictness-permissiveness.

The parent questionnaire contained a list of possible reasons for desiring to adopt transracially and each parent was asked to check her or his main reason. The social worker's questionnaire contained a similar question and an identical list of reasons this family wanted to adopt transracially. Half the reasons could be considered social motivation, e.g., to provide a home for a child nobody seemed to want, the desire to share love and understanding with a child in need of nurture and care; the others tended to denote personal motivation, e.g., desire to have a larger family, the fact that there were no white children available.

Considerable disagreement both between parents and between parents and social workers was found on the specific items, and this was also the case when the items were categorized into the broad groupings of social and personal motivation. Of particular interest was the finding that when the reasons given by the family and social worker differed, the family's expressed reason for desiring to adopt was to fulfill personal needs, whereas the social worker tended to ascribe a social motivation.

Sometimes social workers have been criticized as being too selective about the children they will consider for a prospective adoptive family. It has been said that many families might be open to atypical waiting children were the possibility pursued with them. Whether this was true of the social workers in this study, whether the worker's sole concern was finding homes for waiting black children, or whether the workers were correct in their judgments that these parents might not be appropriate for some types of waiting children, cannot be determined from our data. However, it is clear that in many instances the social

10941

workers saw the families as appropriate for a narrower range of atypical children than the parents would have considered.

As indicated in Section I, the parents were asked about the racial and ethnic background of the children they would have adopted, and were also asked about their willingness to adopt other types of "waiting" children. The social workers were asked to specify which type of child they would have considered for the particular family. The responses of parents who said they would have adopted easily or with reservations were combined and compared with the social worker's responses. With one exception, the parents said that they could have adopted a child of Oriental, American Indian, Mexican-American or Puerto Rican background, but the social workers would not have placed an American Indian or Puerto Rican child with 11 of these families, a Mexican-American child with 13 families, and an Oriental child with 16 of the families. In the one family in which the parents themselves did not agree--on the acceptability of an Oriental child--the social worker would have considered such a child for the family.

There was more divergence between parents in their willingness to consider adopting other types of waiting children. Since the child's adjustment as well as the family's well-being is dependent on the parents being in accord with the plan, only instances were examined in which the social worker's opinion was at variance with that of both parents, or in which one parent would not have considered adopting but the social worker would have considered such a placement. Discrepancies between parental and worker opinion were minimal about adopting slightly retarded children, older children, and children with noncorrectable handicaps. With regard to a child with a serious correctable handicap and a child with mental illness in her or his

10042

immediate background, it was found that in many instances, although the family would have considered adopting such a child, the social worker would not have considered this type of child for the family. In a few instances, on the other hand, the social worker would have considered placing a child with mental illness in the immediate family with parents who would not have accepted such a child.

The parents and social workers were also asked about the skin coloring and the racial background of the child they would have considered. Many parents gave seemingly inconsistent responses to the two questions--that is, they would consider only a child of fair or light brown complexion, but would consider a child both of whose parents were black, and vice versa. There was only one instance of worker inconsistency and only two instances in which the responses of worker and parents were diametrically opposed. In one case the worker tended to see the family as more accepting and in the other case less accepting of racial differences than was indicated by the parental response.

On the several questions dealing with parental expectations regarding behavioral conformity, there again was considerable difference between the parents' responses and the attitudes the workers ascribed to them. The workers usually tended to see the parents, and in particular the fathers, as more permissive than was indicated by the parental response.

Satisfaction With Preplacement Contact

The wives reported an average of 4.5 contacts with the social workers, and the husbands, 3.5 contacts, prior to the placement. The most frequent type of preplacement contact with the agency reported by the parents was a joint office interview. Thirty-five

10043

families reported this type of contact, usually one or two joint office interviews. Twenty-two of the 35 families had attended from one to five group sessions, and in 18 instances the social worker had conducted from one to four joint interviews with the couple in the home. Only 13 wives and 15 husbands had had individual office interviews, and eight wives had had individual interviews at home.

Most of the parents viewed their preplacement contacts with the social worker as ones in which the purpose was to explore mutually and help the parents decide whether to adopt or to assist them in adopting. Nine mothers and 12 fathers, however, felt that the primary purpose of the preplacement study was to focus on their potential as adoptive parents or learn about them as individuals. These latter parents apparently viewed the social worker as the sole decision maker on whether they would be permitted to adopt.

Both parents and social workers were queried about whether the family's preferences regarding the child's sex, skin color and so forth were discussed during the preplacement contacts. They were also asked what subjects were most emphasized by the social worker in these contacts.

The social workers reported that the family's preference regarding the sex and intellectual potential of the child had been discussed with all 37 of the families on whom social workers' questionnaires had been received. In two instances, however, parents said there had been no discussion of the child's sex, and six families said their preference regarding intellectual potential had not been discussed with them.

In all but a few cases the workers said they had discussed the parents' preference regarding the skin color and the race of both parents of the child, but

10044

a good many parents reported that the topic had not been discussed. This was particularly true in regard to whether families preferred a child both or only one of whose parents were black; social workers reported that this matter had been discussed with 31 families, but 12 of these families recalled no such discussion.

As reported earlier, although joint interviews or group sessions in which both parents were present were the principal type of preplacement contact, some of the parents had had individual contacts with the adoption worker. This may account for some of the dissimilarities between parents and social workers on the subjects reported as emphasized most in the preplacement contact. Eleven possible subjects were suggested, and each parent and social worker was asked to check the three that had been emphasized most. Agreement was highest between mothers and fathers, lowest between mothers and social workers. The subject most frequently checked by mothers, fathers and social workers, and the only one on which an appreciable number of the respondents all agreed, was helping the child accept and understand her or his black heritage. Another topic frequently mentioned by the parents and the social workers as having been emphasized was handling of the child's adoptive status. Parents reported much more often than social workers that emphasis had been placed on the reaction of relatives and friends to the adoption and on information about the child's family background and care to date. On the other hand, a subject checked by a substantial number of social workers but relatively few of the parents was changes to anticipate in the family in caring for a child or an additional child. Interestingly, information about the child's family background was a subject least frequently checked as having been stressed by the social workers (two cases), although one or both parents mentioned this in 17 cases.

10045

The parents' satisfaction with the agency was explored from several points of view. One approach was to give the parents a list of 31 statements, asking whether or not each was true of their experience with the agency. Eight of the statements were specific to the fact that the families were adopting transracially, and the other 23 statements were more general in content. A score of 2 was assigned to the positive statements about the agency that were checked as "very true," a 1 to those checked as "somewhat true," and 0 to those checked as "not at all true." The negative statements were scored in the opposite direction. The statements dealing directly with adopting transracially and the more general statements were scored separately. A composite score of the two sets of statements was also obtained.

Possible scores on the transracial adoption items ranged from 0 to 16. No parents scored their agency contact below 4, and 48 of the 76 mothers and fathers gave scores of 10 or more, with mothers tending to give scores somewhat higher than fathers. The statement on which respondents implied greatest negative feeling was one directed toward motivation. Fifteen mothers and 11 fathers felt their motivation for adopting a black child was questioned during their agency contact.

On the questions dealing with other aspects of the agency contact, possible scores ranged from 0 to 46. Only two parents scored their contact below 19, and four gave scores of 46, expressing no dissatisfaction with the agency on the matters listed. The mothers were a little more likely than the fathers to give scores at the high and low extremes, perhaps because they had a greater amount of agency contact than the fathers.

The parents' view of the preplacement contact as one

10946

in which the social worker was determining whether they were acceptable adoptive applicants was further substantiated in their responses to two of the statements on the questionnaire. Twenty mothers and 14 fathers felt that they were being investigated. Sixteen mothers and 18 fathers felt that the agency was sitting in judgment over whether they should get a child. Somewhat in the same vein, 13 mothers and 17 fathers felt that the pressure was on them to talk, rather than to participate in a give-and-take relationship.

On only a few other statements did a fairly sizable proportion of the parents, usually more mothers than fathers, respond in a manner indicative of some dissatisfaction or unease with their agency contract. Fourteen mothers and 12 fathers responded that it was not true that they had been given helpful information about caring for a child. Nine mothers, but only four fathers, had the feeling that they must be "perfect" to adopt, felt that the agency did not provide them with information on problems they might anticipate, and reported that the procedures and reasons for them were not explained.

An examination of the composite score for the two sets of statements gives further evidence that in general these 38 sets of parents found their experience satisfactory. With a possible score ranging from 0 to 62, well over half (24 of both the mothers and the fathers had scores of 45 or more, and only five mothers and four fathers had scores below 36.

Another approach to parent satisfaction was to inquire whether prior to or at the time of placement the parents had received sufficient information in four specific areas about their prospective adopted child. Eighteen families said information had been sufficient in all areas, but 20 families felt that they lacked information in one or more areas. The frequency of in-

10947

sufficient information in the four areas was: the child's prior experience, 11 families; the child's natural parents, nine; the child's habits, seven; the child's personality, three. The parents were also asked whether there was other information they had not received that would have been helpful in caring for their child. The most frequent response, mentioned in five instances, was information about the child's medical history.

The questionnaire given each parent at Time 1 also included a list of 21 items dealing with adoption procedures and practices prior to placement. The parents were to indicate whether, from their experience with the agency, they believed a change in any particular procedure or practice was needed.

The agency's procedures and practices were questioned by a few more fathers than mothers; all but 12 mothers and eight fathers saw a need for changes. Usually change was felt to be needed in only one or two areas, but a few parents saw the need for several procedural or policy changes. Since this has been one of the most frequently criticized aspects of adoption practice, it was not particularly surprising to find that the change most frequently desired was reducing the time between applying for and receiving a child. This was checked by 14 mothers and 13 fathers. Of particular interest is a lack of consensus among the parents on this item, their apparent differing expectations in relation to how long it should take, and the fact that dissatisfaction was not necessarily associated with a long waiting period.

The need for more flexibility in arranging appointment times was the item checked next in frequency--by 12 mothers and 12 fathers. No more than five mothers checked any other item. On the other hand, a substantial number of fathers expressed need for change in agency policies regarding infertility. Ten fathers

19848

checked "yes" to both items dealing with this ("Omit requirement of a fertility examination" and "Eliminate questions about infertility").

At Time 1 the families were asked to indicate how they felt about the way the agency had handled their request by checking one of four responses, from "very approving" to "very critical." They were also asked to indicate on a 5-point scale their degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the agency to date. The social workers were asked to check two similar items regarding their perception of how the families felt.

Since these families had recently received a child who was still not legally theirs, it is possible that they did not feel free to be critical. Twenty-eight of the 37 mothers responding indicated that they were "very approving" of the agency's handling of their request and six mothers, "generally approving." Fathers tended to give somewhat lower ratings, with 23 of the 38 checking that they were "very approving" and 13 checking "somewhat approving." Only three mothers and two fathers indicated that they were "slightly critical," and none checked "very critical."

When the "very approving" and "generally approving" responses of the parents were combined, the social worker's perception of the family's feeling was usually in accord with the parents' responses. In three instances, however, in which families had indicated approval, the worker believed them to be critical, and in two instances the opposite occurred.

Although the parents' responses were slightly less positive on general satisfaction with the agency than on their feeling about the handling of the request, the workers' perception of how the parents felt was more positive on the second question. Five mothers and three fathers rated their total agency experience to date as only "so-so," one father rated his as

10049

slightly unsatisfactory, and one mother rated hers as very unsatisfactory. Although the social workers made correct assessments of the feelings of 32 of the 37 families, in the other five instances they perceived the families' experience as positive, whereas the families reported this not to be so.

Postplacement Contact

Both the social workers and the parents were queried at Time 2 about the number of workers, the number of contacts, the subjects discussed, and the family's satisfaction with their overall experience with the agency after the child's placement in the home. The helpfulness of the postplacement contacts was explored with the parents only.

Usually the family had the same worker throughout the postplacement period, but in six instances there was one change in worker.

Contact with the social worker was, according to the parents' report, somewhat less during the postplacement period than it had been prior to the child's placement. Among the mothers, the number of contacts ranged from one to seven, with an average of 3.2. For the fathers, postplacement contacts ranged from none to six, with the average 2.2.

The social workers tended to report more contacts than did the families, whether or not there had been worker continuity. In only nine instances did social worker and family agree in their recall of the number of joint interviews, the most usual form of contact during the postplacement period. Families usually reported from one to three fewer than did the social workers, but in three instances the workers reported fewer contacts than did the parents. The reports of individual contacts with the fathers were usually in agreement, but

10050

these occurred in only a handful of cases. In 13 instances there was agreement that no individual contacts had occurred with the mothers. Two other mothers reported that they had not been seen individually, but their social workers reported having seen them once or twice.

The social workers were asked whether all, most or only some of their contacts with the family were worker-initiated, and also whether during these contacts it was usually the worker, the parents or both who initiated the topics for discussion. Not surprisingly, in 20 of the 34 cases the workers reported that they had initiated all the interviews, and in 10 other cases the workers responded that they had initiated most of them. Again considerable divergence was found in the parents' perceptions of who had initiated the contacts, but there was no particular pattern. Sometimes it was thought by the worker that the parents had initiated some of the contacts, but the parents did not believe this was so; at other times parents reported having initiated contact, whereas workers reported they had not. Although the social workers reported initiating most of the interviews, in only four instances did the worker report that most of the discussions in the interviews were worker-initiated. In the other 30 cases, the discussions were initiated by both worker and parents.

Both social workers and families were queried about the subjects discussed during postplacement contacts. The workers were also asked to indicate as many as three subjects they considered particularly important. Perhaps because they individualized each family, the subjects they considered particularly important varied a good deal. The only subjects mentioned as particularly important in the case of 10 or more of the families were the relatives' reactions to the adopted child and possible identity problems for the child

10051

because of her or his racial background.

The social workers tended to check as having been discussed many more subjects than were recalled by the parents. The reactions of relatives, friends and neighbors to the child were the three subjects mentioned with the greatest frequency by the parents. Relatives' and friends' reactions and possible identity problems for the child were most frequently checked by the social workers.

There was only one subject that more parents than social workers recalled having discussed--books on black history or black culture. On the other hand, approximately twice as many social workers as families reported that there had been discussion concerning how to tell the adopted child about her or his black heritage, possible identity problems for the child, and helping the child accept her or his black heritage.

The differences cited may result from selective recall, poor communication or other factors. It is of interest, however, that parents had more recall of a tangible facilitator--i.e., books. One can only speculate that the parents may not have recalled other topics of discussion because of their own discomfort, the worker's handling of the subject, or the fact that the subject had not seemed important at the time. Another possibility is that these items were recalled by the social workers as having been discussed because they were recognized as usually important areas, but may have been touched on only tangentially or not at all in the particular case.

Several questions at Time 2 were directed toward gaining some assessment from the families of the worker's helpfulness to them during the postplacement period. From the responses it would appear that many of the families received little they believed of practical value in coping with the problems that did arise and

10452

that many tended not to confide in their social worker. More than half the families viewed the post-placement contact as a requirement rather than as a facilitating service. In those instances where parents did find it of help, the mother usually saw the helpfulness as coming from the worker's supportive role--that is, the worker's reassurance or approval. The fathers who saw the worker as helpful usually referred to the fact that they could discuss general or specific problem areas with the worker.

When parents were asked about potential problems that were discussed and the worker's helpfulness with these, the responses were mixed. On three of the five subjects reported by more than half the families as discussed--the reactions of neighbors, friends and the relatives to the child--more frequently than not the families had not found the discussion helpful. In the two other areas, which were more concrete--how to go about meeting with others who had adopted transracially, and the possibility of returning to the agency for further discussion later should the need arise--more parents viewed the discussion as helpful than not.

Despite the worker's seemingly greater helpfulness on the more concrete or practical matters, there was neglect of one matter of great practical concern to many parents who adopt transracially. Fifteen of the 35 families seen at Time 2 indicated that their black children had special problems in hair grooming and/or skin care. In only three instances did the worker help them with this. Usually the parents got help from friends or else did the best they could.

The family's perception of the worker as someone required to visit rather than someone who was there to facilitate the adoption was also evident. Although 15 of the 35 families admitted that they had had some

after-the-fact questions about their decision to adopt, only three families had discussed these questions with their worker and none of these families felt that the worker had been helpful.

When the parents and social workers were asked to rate the parents' satisfaction with their experience with the agency, they usually agreed that the experience had been satisfactory. In the five instances of disagreement, the social worker rated the family as having been more satisfied with the agency than the family had indicated.

4. Implications for Practice

The finding that the black children placed with the families in this study were on the average less than 4 months old, much younger at placement than the children in the followup study, came as a surprise, since the opinion is prevalent that black families are readily available for black infants. This limited experience suggests that at least in some areas greater effort to recruit black homes even for very young black children was needed 2 years ago and may still be needed.

Although this study was confined to only 38 families, at least among these parents it would seem that there was a higher degree of racial awareness and recognition of potential problems than was the case for those adopting transracially at an earlier time. Prior to adoption more families already had had exposure to persons in minority groups and to others who had adopted transracially. More families admitted to adopting transracially as a "second choice," but it may be that their ability to recognize and admit to this augers well for their acceptance of racial differences and their willingness to assist their child in maintaining her or his racial identity.

10054

The social workers' favorable evaluation of these families in comparison with families with whom they had placed white children can be looked at two ways. On the one hand, it is good to know that the families are unusually well equipped to meet the needs of these children who do not share the parents' racial heritage. On the other hand, it is possible that workers are so eager to place a child with parents they regard highly that they do not exert themselves fully to find parents of the same race.

What can be learned from this exploration of the experience of 38 prospective adoptive families that has implications for adoption practice? The families were generally well satisfied with their agency experience, and the families and their social workers saw eye to eye on many matters. On the other hand, the discrepancies between the reports of workers and parents and the parental response to some of the items suggest communication barriers, as well as a somewhat limited understanding of these adoptive families by many of their workers.

One point of divergence between parents and social workers was the range of atypical children appropriate for the families. The families expressed themselves as open to a wider range of children than the social workers would have considered placing with them. The social workers may be right in their judgments, or they may have been so preoccupied with placing black infants in white homes that they were not sufficiently flexible in their thinking. That social workers ascribed social or altruistic motivations to some of the families who gave personal reasons raises question not only about the workers' perception of the families but also whether some workers may view altruistic motivation as preferable. Another point of divergence concerned the parents' strictness-permissiveness, with the social workers assuming the parents to be more

1 0 5

permissive than the parents portrayed themselves. This suggests that it might be well to explore with adoptive applicants their expectations with respect to children's behavior.

Seemingly the role of the adoptive father still tends to be viewed as secondary to that of the adoptive mother. During both the preplacement and postplacement contacts, mothers averaged approximately one more appointment than did fathers. Very likely the father's employment accounts for much of this differential; however, if parenting is a mutual endeavor, should not efforts be made to equalize the time given both parents?

The feeling of many of the parents that they were being investigated and judged during the preplacement study is hardly news, and maybe it is realistic. Even though workers view the preadoption study as a mutual undertaking, with their role that of information-giver, clarifier and facilitator, many adoptive parents apparently do not see it in this light. This is understandable. Even with the approach of screening in rather than screening out, and of worker and family exploring together the appropriateness of adoption, ultimate responsibility remains with the agency to insure as well as possible that the applicants will be able to meet the needs of an adopted child.

Perhaps it is this unease about feeling that they are being studied that made parents miss or forget some of the content of their preplacement contacts, or maybe the social workers' recall was inaccurate. In any case, a number of families thought that their preferences were not explored and that they were not given as much information about the child, his background, his habits, and his medical history as would have been helpful. It may be that workers' concern that the adoptive parents face up to possible difficulties with relatives and neighbors prompted by a transracial

00956

adoption diverts them from meeting the parents' need for specific information of use in understanding and caring for the particular child.

Not many recommendations were made by the parents for change in preplacement policy or procedure. Reducing the waiting time and being more flexible in scheduling appointments were the main suggestions. In addition, a number of fathers objected to agency exploration of infertility.

The parents' assessment of the postplacement contact is a matter of concern, if their reactions are at all typical of transracially adopting parents or adopting parents in general. They found the contacts with the social worker of little help, and they remembered fewer contacts than the social worker reported. It is true that some mothers valued the supportiveness of the worker, but the parents seemed loath to raise questions and perceived little benefit in much of the discussion. Worker preoccupation with the reactions of relatives, friends and neighbors seemed to the parents of little avail. The more practical the area of discussion (e.g., how to meet other transracially adopting parents), the more helpful the parents found it. The practical area in which the parents most often needed and least often received any help from the worker was the problem of grooming hair and skin. Adoption workers should be alert to this and equipped to advise.

It may be that parents hesitate to admit to problems or ask questions lest this raise doubts about their adequacy as adoptive parents. They doubtless feel that the social worker is still sitting in judgment, rather than supporting their efforts to parent an adopted child. Although agency concern for the child's welfare does not cease with the placement, the placement itself is an expression of confidence that the parents will eventually assume full responsibility

for the child. Somehow the worker must let the parents know of the agency's belief in their capability of parenting an adopted child and help them feel freer to ask questions and present problems. The worker must also realize that, despite all the emotions involved in adoption, specific information and practical help are the things parents seem to thirst for and value when received.

10058

PART II. ADOPTION STAFF ATTITUDES

In the 1960s adoption practice changed from insistence on racial matching for all adoptions to willingness to consider placement across racial lines. Recognition of the need for permanent homes for black children and the difficulty agencies experienced in finding black adoptive homes made experimentation with transracial placements almost inevitable. In turn, the change in practice led to an interest in research that would answer questions about the extent to which such adoptions were successful.

About the time the Research Center of the Child Welfare League of America launched its followup study, the atmosphere surrounding transracial adoption changed radically. A public statement of strong opposition to the practice from the National Association of Black Social Workers was the most direct expression of the feelings that influenced this change. Although precise figures are unavailable, as they seldom are in such situations, the experience of the research staff itself indicated that many agencies ceased to place children across racial lines or did so only as a last resort.

These swings in practice made particularly timely a substudy of current adoptions of black children by white parents. The characteristics of the adoptive parents and the social workers involved in 38 such adoptions and their perceptions of each other are described in Part I.

10059

To describe general professional opinion about transracial adoption in the agencies through which these adoptions were arranged, the nine participating agencies were asked in the spring of 1972 to distribute a questionnaire to each adoption worker, adoption supervisor and adoption department head in their agencies. The collective estimates of these agencies suggested a total population of about 700 adoption workers, but only 155 questionnaires were returned. Since they were distributed through the agencies, it is not possible to ascertain the extent to which the difference is due to gross overestimates of staff size and to lack of response on the part of the workers. It is impossible, then, to assert that this sample of workers is representative of the adoption field, of those agencies making transracial placements, or even of the participating agencies. Nevertheless, the nature of the responses, the concerns and the priorities they reflect, and the variations within the sample are of interest to the field and may throw some light on the issues involved. This report presents each area covered by the questionnaire, describes the responses, and discusses some of the variables associated with different reactions to the questions asked.

1. Population Characteristics

The sample of 155 respondents was heavily female (95%) and white (88%). Forty-five percent were between the ages of 21 and 34, 17% between 35 and 44, 22% between 45 and 54, and 16% were 55 and over. The largest group were married (54%), while 28% were single and 16% formerly married. The remaining 2% did not report marital status.

The majority (79%) were employed as caseworkers, 19% were supervisors or directors of adoption departments, and one was an agency director. Sixty percent had master's degrees in social work, and 19% had taken some graduate courses in the field. Eighteen percent

00630

had only bachelor's degrees, and 3% had master's degrees in other fields. The largest group (45%) had over 10 years of social work experience. Thirty-two percent had more than 5 years but less than 10, while 23% had less than 5 years. Fourteen percent had been in the adoption field for less than a year, 17% between 1 and 3 years, 15% between 3 and 5 years, 26% between 5 and 10 years, and 22% had 10 years or more of adoption experience. The remaining 6% had no direct placement experience. A cross-tabulation between the two variables indicated that the sample was about evenly divided between those whose experience was entirely within the adoption field and those who had worked in some other field of social work. Twenty-six percent of the respondents had made no transracial placements. Nineteen percent had made one, 23% had made two or three, 18% had made from four to nine, and 10% had made 10 or more. The remaining 4% had not made adoptive placements directly. The sample was about evenly divided between those who had made at least one such placement within the 12-month period preceding the study and those who had not.

The largest group was employed by the County of Los Angeles Department of Adoption (60%), with others employed by four agencies in Minneapolis-St. Paul (18%), two agencies in Boston (16%) and two agencies in Seattle (6%). Because the Los Angeles agency was heavily represented, comparisons were made between these workers and all the others in the sample. No significant differences were found in relation to any of the worker characteristics described here. As is shown later, significant differences were found between the Los Angeles workers and the others in the sample on a number of attitudinal measures. These can be assumed to be real differences, rather than spurious ones that might have resulted had there been any interaction with other demographic variables.

The instructions given in the questionnaire asked the respondents to give their own opinions regardless of

10061

agency policy. Since questionnaires were mailed directly to the League by the respondents, there is no reason to think that respondents were inhibited in expressing views that diverged from agency policy. Whether they in fact expressed their own views or views they considered professionally acceptable cannot be determined.

2. The "Riskiness" of Transracial Adoption

General Response

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with 25 statements reflecting problems related to transracial adoption. Strong consensus was found on 20 of these statements, since two-thirds or more of the respondents gave answers in the same direction.

The unanimity of the respondents in agreeing that transracial adoption was an acceptable practice is reflected in the fact that 94% disagreed with the statement that "white families should not be permitted to adopt children of black heritage," 92% disagreed that "it is better for a black child to be placed in long-term foster care than to be adopted by a white family," 87% disagreed that "white families cannot prepare black children to cope with the problems of living in our racially divided society," 69% disagreed with the statement that "a child both of whose parents are black should not be placed with a white family," while 79% agreed that "the possible confusion of the black child in a white home about his racial identity is strongly outweighed by the values of having a family."

On the other hand, 79% of the respondents agreed with the statement that "transracial adoptions are usually more risky than inracial adoptions." The following responses were also consistent with this view:

10062

"The motivation of couples wishing to adopt transracially needs to be explored far more than does the motivation of couples wishing to adopt inracially." (79% agreement)

"White couples adopting black children need to have greater emotional maturity and more stable marriages than do couples adopting children of their own race." (79% agreement)

"White couples adopting a black child should live in or move to integrated neighborhoods." (66% agreement)

The respondents' general refusal to equate the risk involved in a transracial adoption with that involved in adoption of other types of hard-to-place children or with other difficult social situations is consistent with their view of transracial adoption as a hazardous process. This is reflected in their responses to:

"Adoption of a black child by a white family presents no more problems than the adoption of an American Indian or Korean child." (88% disagreement)

"Growing up in our current-day society is as difficult for a black child in a black home as in a white home." (69% disagreement)

"A family who adopts a white child with a severe physical handicap is likely to encounter more problems than is a white family who adopts a black child." (66% disagreement)

Respondents were practically unanimous that the home study should not be modified to encourage transracial adoption. All but one respondent disagreed with the statement that "the preadoptive study should be less extensive for white families adopting a black child than for families wishing to adopt within their own

10063

race," and 86% disagreed with the statement that "when there is a shortage of homes for black children, the requirements in regard to the emotional and social functioning of the adoptive parents should be relaxed." Eighty-seven percent disagreed with the statement that "agency requirements for couples adopting transracially should be far more flexible than for white couples adopting a white infant."

A strong degree of concern was also expressed in relation to the importance of preserving the child's black identity. Ninety-seven percent agreed with the statement that "even if a black child looks white and is adopted by a white family, he should be told of and helped to appreciate his black heritage." Similarly, 94% were in accord with the statement that "every parent who wishes to adopt a black child must show evidence of willingness to invest in helping the child to retain his black identity."

Not all responses are as consistent as those already described. Despite agreement that motivation of couples seeking transracial adoption should be even more fully explored than motivation in other adoption cases, 94% of the respondents disagreed with the statement that "white families who want to adopt black children are generally more interested in the cause of integration than in providing homes for the children." Despite the high degree of risk seen in transracial adoption, respondents did not think that parents should be protected from other problems, since 83% disagreed with the statement that "a family who adopts transracially should be given a child who is average or above average physically, emotionally and intellectually," and 75% disagreed with the statement that "when placing a black child in a white home, far more effort must be made to insure that the child has no emotional or intellectual handicaps than is necessary when making an intracial placement."

10961

The respondents showed considerable disagreement on four items, but some of the disagreement may result from differences in interpretation of the statements. Lack of consensus on the need for followup care was expressed in the responses to the statement, "After the adoption is finalized, the adoption agency should maintain contact with white families who adopt black children, as such families need far more help than do families adopting inracially." Forty-six percent of the respondents agreed, 52% disagreed, and 2% did not respond.

Lack of consensus was also seen on the question whether transracial adoption should be actively encouraged. Forty-five percent of the respondents agreed with the statement that "when black children are in need of homes, white applicants should be encouraged to consider adopting a black child," while 55% disagreed, and one did not respond.

On the two remaining statements it is difficult to interpret the meaning of the disagreement. Fifty-three percent of the respondents disagreed that "white families who adopt black children should be commended rather than criticized by blacks," while 31% agreed and 16% did not respond. Forty-eight percent agreed that "a child who has one white parent is as well off in a white home as in a black home," while 48% disagreed, and 4% did not respond.

Variables Associated With the Perception of Transracial Adoption as Risky

Despite the generally strong consensus of the responses, it is still possible that there are some meaningful differences among the respondents. To simplify the process of analyzing such differences, the intercorrelations were computed on 18 of the 25 questions (those having a minority response of 20% or higher). Of these, the following five showed statistically

10965

significant positive intercorrelations, indicating that respondents who agreed or disagreed with any one of them tended to respond in the same way to the others.

1. Transracial adoptions are usually more risky than inracial adoptions.

2. A child both of whose parents are black should not be placed with a white family.

3. The motivation of couples wishing to adopt transracially needs to be explored far more than does the motivation of couples wishing to adopt inracially.

4. White families cannot prepare black children to cope with the problems of living in our racially divided society.

5. After the adoption is finalized, adoption agencies should maintain contact with white families who adopt black children, as such families need far more help than do families adopting inracially.

In addition, all five of these statements correlated negatively with the statement that "the possible confusion of the black child in a white home about his racial identity is strongly outweighed by the values of having a family." Thus all six statements could be combined in an index on which the means for thsee two-category items ranged from 1 to 2. Respondents with a score of 1.00 to 1.16 tended to agree with the first five and disagree with the last, and could be said to regard transracial adoption as very risky. The analysis indicated that 34% of the respondents could be so characterized. Respondents with scores of 1.51 to 2.00 tended to disagree with the first five statements and agree with the sixth, and could be said to view transracial adoption as relatively free of risk. Twenty-one percent of the workers

10966

involved were so characterized. The remaining 45%, with scores of 1.17 to 1.50, were seen as considering transracial adoption as moderately risky.

When these categories were cross-tabulated against the characteristics of the respondents described in Section 1, experience with transracial adoption and employment by the Los Angeles agency were the only variables that showed statistically significant relationships with attitudes toward the "riskiness" of such adoptions.

Workers who had made only one transracial placement were more likely to fall into the "low-risk" category than either those who made none or those who had made two or more.

Table 2-1

"Riskiness" of Transracial Adoption and Experience With Transracial Placement

Risk	None N=46 %	One N=29 %	Two or More N=80 %
Low	13	38	21
Moderate	48	24	51
High	39	38	28
Total	100	100	100

Chi-square = 10.01, 4 df, $p < .05$

10067

Workers at the Los Angeles County Department of Adoptions, one of the first to make such placements in relatively large numbers, were more likely to see such placements as involving moderate or high risk than the workers in other agencies represented in the sample.

Table 2-2

"Riskiness" of Transracial Adoption and Place of Employment

Risk	Los Angeles N=93 %	All Others N=62 %
Low	15	31
Moderate/high	85	69
Total	100	100

Chi-square = 4.51, 1 df, $p < .05$

3. "Belonging"

General

Respondents were asked how long they thought it would take for white adoptive parents to feel that a child was their own, differentiating by race and age. The response indicated that most considered age a stronger deterrent in this regard than race.

4468

Table 2-3

"Belonging" by Age and Race

	Less Than 1 Month %	More Than 1 Month, Less Than 6 %	6 Months or More %
White infant	64	33	3
Black infant	45	46	9
White toddler	9	79	12
Black toddler	8	75	17
White school-age	2	58	40
Black school-age	2	55	43

A cross-tabulation of the response by race for each age group indicated 24% of the respondents thought it would take longer for parents to feel that a black infant was theirs than for a white infant, while 13% saw a similar difference for toddlers, and only 5% saw such a difference for school-age children.

Variables Associated With Optimism or Pessimism About "Belonging"

Strong differences of opinion about the time it takes parents to feel that a black adopted child belongs to them were found by race of the worker, total experience in transracial adoption, and place of employment, but in all of these comparisons differences were also found for white children. Since there were only 21 nonwhite workers (12% of the sample), findings in relation to race cannot be considered strong. However, the race of the worker was too obviously important in the context of the issues in this study to be ignored. The analysis, as can be seen later, demonstrated a number of differences between the nonwhite workers and the white majority that are worth noting.

10069

Nonwhite workers were more likely than white workers to believe that it would take longer for white parents to feel that a black infant or a black toddler was their own. However, even for white infants nonwhite workers saw it as taking longer than did white workers. On the other hand, no such differences are seen in relation to white toddlers or to school-age children of either race. Thus one cannot be certain how much of the differences seen may be due to a more general pessimism among nonwhite workers about the time required to incorporate an adopted child in the home and how much to skepticism about transracial adoption.

Table 2-4

"Belonging" of White Infants, Black Infants, Black Toddlers and Race of Workers

Time	White Infant: White Workers N=134 %	White Infant: Nonwhite Workers N=21 %	Black Infant: White Workers N=134 %	Black Infant: Nonwhite Workers N=21 %
Less than 1 month	67	57	51	43
More than 1 month, less than 6	28	24	36	24
6 months or more	5	19	13	33
Total	100	100	100	100
	Chi-square = 6.38, 2 df, $p < .04$		Chi-square = 6.07, 2 df, $p < .05$	

Time	Black Toddler		
Less than 1 year	87	67	Chi-square = 3.95, 1 df, $p < .05$
One year or more	13	33	
Total	100	100	

00070

Workers who had made four or more transracial placements tended to be more optimistic about the time parents need to feel that a black infant or black toddler is their own, but they too showed a similar optimism in relation to white infants as well as a trend in the same direction for white school-age children that missed statistical significance.

Table 2-5

"Belonging" of White Infants, Black Infants, Black Toddlers, and Experience in Transracial Placements

	White Infant		Black Infant		Black Toddler	
	0-3	4+	0-3	4+	0-3	4+
Time	N=111	N=44	N=111	N=44	N=111	N=44
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Within 1 month	60	82	44	66	44	70
More than 1 month	40	18	56	34	56	30
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
	Chi-square= 6.04, 1 df, $p < .01$		Chi-square= 5.60, 1 df, $p < .02$		Chi-square= 6.36, 1 df, $p < .02$	

Workers at the Los Angeles agency thought it took longer for parents to feel that a black infant belonged to them. This difference appeared for black toddlers and black school-age children, but it also held for white infants and white school-age children and just missed statistical significance in the case of white toddlers. In the case of infants and toddlers, the difference is somewhat stronger for black children than for white, but the overall indications

00071

are of pessimism or perhaps realism about the time needed to absorb any adopted child, rather than specifically a black adopted child.

Table 2-6

"Belonging" of Adopted Children and Place of Employment

	Los Angeles N=93 %	Other Agencies N=62 %	
White infants (Within 1 month)	57	79	$p < .02$
Black infants (Within 1 month)	40	64	$p < .002$
White toddlers (Less than 6 months)	47	66	$p < .06$
Black toddlers (Less than 6 months)	41	66	$p < .02$
White school-age (More than 1 year)	46	26	$p < .04$
Black school-age (More than 1 year)	47	27	$p < .05$

4. Eligibility Considerations

Respondents were given a list of 37 characteristics commonly considered in determining the eligibility of adoptive applicants. They were asked to rate each as "very important," "somewhat important," or "of little importance," first in the case of white inracial

10872

adoption, then black inracial adoption, finally trans-racial adoption. These characteristics received the same general responses for each type of adoption, with a few exceptions noted later.

The three percentages reflecting the majority response to each form of adoption were averaged and are listed below. The 17 characteristics rated as "very important" were predominantly, but not exclusively, those concerned with the applicants' capacities in child rearing. Feelings about the specific problems related to adoption were also rated as "very important," but not to the same degree as child-rearing characteristics.

Characteristic	Percent
Degree of sensitivity, understanding, tolerance for children's difficulties	98
Marital adjustment	96
Ability to let a child develop in own way and at own pace	96
Ability to cope with problems, frustrations and disappointments	95
Capacity to love child for her/his own sake	95
Ability to deal with developmental problems	95
Emotional stability	94
Ability to accept normal risks in child rearing	94
Ability to assume responsibility for care, guidance and protection of children	90
Current life adjustment	88
Degree of interest in adopting	87
Feelings about children born out of wedlock	76
Feelings about parents who relinquish	73
Feelings about unmarried parents	71
Infertility	69
Feelings about inherited traits	66
Health	50

10073

The characteristics usually rated as "moderately important" are economic and social factors, as well as the willingness of the adoptive parents to cooperate with agency procedures.

Characteristic	Percent
Length of current marriage	75
Relationship to extended family	76
Age	73
Relationship to neighbors	70
Early-life adjustment	67
Work adjustment	66
Housing	64
Income	62
Depth and extent of friendships	61
Man's willingness to make himself available for agency appointments even if it means taking time off from work	58
Women's willingness to make herself available for agency appointments	55
Employment	53

Only four characteristics tended to be rated as unimportant and of these, only one--church attendance--showed strong consensus on the part of the respondents as to its unimportance.

Characteristic	Percent
Church attendance	92
Occupation of man	55
Education	55
Religious and philosophical beliefs	46

Respondents differentiated strongly among the three types of adoption on only one variable--the importance of contact with minority group members--and to a lesser degree on three others, as shown in Table 2-7.

Table 2-7

Eligibility Considerations Invoking Differential Response on White Inracial, Black Inracial and Transracial Adoption

	Very Important %	Somewhat Important %	Of Little Importance %
Contact with minority group members			
White inracial	6	36	58
Black inracial	13	46	41
Transracial	69	28	3
Involvement in social and political concerns			
White inracial	1	39	60
Black inracial	1	32	67
Transracial	14	48	38
Willingness to participate in agency group meetings			
White inracial	16	58	25
Black inracial	8	57	35
Transracial	23	57	20
Standing in the Community			
White inracial	1	37	62
Black inracial	0	40	60
Transracial	7	46	47

Variations on the Importance Attached to Eligibility Requirements

A correlational analysis of 25 characteristics on which there was at least a 20% minority response indicated that the respondents reacted consistently

00075

in two areas: those items related to socioeconomic status (standing in the community, income, housing, education, employment of woman, and occupation of man) and those relating to the underlying psychological factors in adoption (feelings about unmarried parents, out-of-wedlock children, inherited traits, parents who relinquish, and infertility). As already noted, the general trend was to consider the first group of items as "somewhat important" and the second group as "very important." Two indices were constructed for each type of adoption, on which respondents could be scored according to the importance they attached to either of these clusters of characteristics. Scores could range from 1.00 to 2.00. Respondents with scores of 1.00 or slightly higher considered the items in question "of little importance." Those with scores at about 1.50 fell into the "moderately important" category and those with scores of 2 or slightly lower considered these items "important." The distributions varied somewhat with each index, but respondents were fairly evenly divided among these categories.

When these index scores were related to the variables describing the respondents, significant differences were found by race of the worker and social work experience in relation to socioeconomic factors, while adoption experience and place of employment were significantly related to the importance attached to the underlying psychological factors in adoption.

Nonwhite workers rated the socioeconomic factors as more important than did white workers in the case of transracial adoption. They also tended to do so in relation to both forms of inracial adoption, but the latter differences missed statistical significance.

Table 2-8

Race of Worker and Importance of Socioeconomic Factors in Transracial Adoption

Importance	White Workers N=134 %	Nonwhite Workers N=21 %
Low	32	10
Moderate	37	33
High	31	57
Total	100	100

Chi-square = 6.59, 2 df, $p < .04$

Workers with more than 10 years of social work experience attached more importance to the socioeconomic status of the parents in a white inracial adoption than did those with less experience, but they did not differentiate in the same way for either black inracial adoption or transracial adoption.

Table 2-9

Social Work Experience and Importance of Socioeconomic Factors in White Inracial Adoption

Importance	Under 10 Years N=85 %	10 Years or More N=70 %
Low	45	23
Moderate/high	55	77
Total	100	100

Chi-square = 5.03, 1 df, $p < .02$

00077

Workers with the least adoption experience and those with the most tended to attach greater importance to the psychological factors in adoption than did those with moderate experience.

Table 2-10

Adoption Experience and Importance of Psychological Factors in Transracial Adoption

Importance	Under 1 Year N=30 %	1-4 Years N=50 %	5-9 Years N=41 %	10 Years or More N=34 %
Low	20	36	17	29
Moderate	27	38	51	21
High	53	26	32	50
Total	100	100	100	100

Chi-square = 20.49, 6 df, $p < .01$

Workers in the Los Angeles agency attached significantly less importance to psychological factors in transracial adoption than did others in the study, but they also did so in the case of both forms of inracial adoption, suggesting again that this is part of a general pattern in this agency, rather than one specifically related to transracial adoption.

Table 2-11

Place of Employment and Importance of Psychological Factors in Adoption

Importance	Black Inracial		White Inracial	
	Los Angeles N=93 %	Others N=62 %	Los Angeles N=93 %	Others N=62 %
Low	39	16	38	19
Moderate	31	42	27	29
High	30	42	35	52
Total	100	100	100	100
	Chi-square = 9.10, 2 df, $p < .01$		Chi-square = 6.47, 2 df, $p < .04$	

Importance	Transracial	
	Los Angeles N=93 %	Others N=62 %
Low	34	15
Moderate	30	43
High	36	42
Total	100	100
	Chi-square = 7.87, 2 df, $p < .02$	

00079

5. Important Topics for Discussion With Adoptive Applicants

General

Respondents were given a list of 10 topics for discussion with adoptive applicants and asked to choose the three they considered most important, again differentiating by white inracial, black inracial, and transracial adoption. The findings indicated, however, that most respondents did not differentiate among these types of adoption and tended to check the same topics as important in all three instances.

The five topics most frequently designated as most important were:

	Percent
Problems specific to the behavior and personality of this child	63
Handling child's questions about her/his biological parents	45
Physical care and emotional nurturing of the child	43
Changes to anticipate in family in caring for a child	30
Information about this child's family background and care to date	26

Five topics (timing of the handling of the child's adoptive status, problems to anticipate in adolescence, reactions of relatives and/or friends, preparation of any other children in the family, and reactions of neighbors or others in the community) were never named as taking priority for all forms of adoption, and less than 25% of the respondents designated them as more important in one form of adoption than another.

44430

Thirty respondents (19%) checked reactions of relatives and friends as a more important topic to be discussed in a transracial adoption than in an inracial adoption, while 25 (16%) did so in the case of reactions of neighbors, and 13 (8%) in reference to problems to anticipate in adolescence.

Variations Among the Respondents on Important Topics

When the 10 topics listed were cross-tabulated against each of the variables describing the respondents, only two--problems to anticipate in adolescence and preparation of other children in the family--showed no differences by any of the worker characteristics. At least one significant difference in the relative importance attached to the other eight topics was found in relation to each of the descriptive variables with the exceptions of the worker's age, professional training and location.

Nonwhite workers were more likely to attach importance to handling the child's questionsabout the biological parents than were white workers.

Table 2-12

Handling Child's Questions. . .
and Race of Worker

Importance	White N=134 %	Nonwhite N=21 %
None	42	14
Important for all or some	58	86
Total	100	100

Chi-square = 4.71, 1 df, $p < .05$

99981

Single respondents attached more importance to the reactions of neighbors and friends than did married respondents. They tended to do the same in relation to reactions of relatives, but this difference missed statistical significance. Married respondents were more likely to attach importance to the discussion of changes to anticipate in the family in caring for a child than did single respondents.

The workers with the least social work experience were the ones most likely to regard the handling of the child's questions about the biological parents as an important topic in all forms of adoption.

Table 2-13

Handling Child's Questions. . .
and Social Work Experience

Importance	Under 5 Years N=35 %	5-9 Years N=50 %	10 Years or More N=70 %
None	29	52	33
Some	11	12	24
Important for all	60	36	43
Total	100	100	100

Chi-square = 10.08, 4 df, $p < .04$

Both the workers with the least adoption experience and those with the most were more likely to attach some importance to the reactions of relatives and friends. On the other hand, the most experienced

19652

adoption workers attached relatively less importance to "problem specific to behavior and personality of this child" than did the others in the study.

Table 2-14

Reactions of Relatives. . .
and Adoption Experience

Importance	Under 3 Years N=57 %	3-4 Years N=23 %	5 Years or More N=75 %
None	67	96	78
Some	33	4	22
Total	100	100	100

Chi-square = 7.69, 1 df, $p < .03$

Table 2-15

Problems Specific to the Behavior. . .
and Adoption Experience

Importance	Under 10 Years N=111 %	10 Years or More N=34 %
None	14	41
Some	86	59
Total	100	100

Chi-square = 4.89, 1 df, $p < .05$

10983

Workers with little experience in transracial adoption were more likely to attach some importance to the reaction of neighbors than were the relatively experienced.

Table 2-16

Reactions of Neighbors. . .
and Experience With Transracial Adoption

Importance	None-One N=75 %	Two or More N=80 %
None	75	90
Some	25	10
Total	100	100

Chi-square = 5.31, 1 df, $p < .03$

Workers with more recent experience in transracial adoption were more likely to attach importance to physical care and emotional nuture of the child as a topic of discussion than were those with less recent experience.

Table 2-17

Physical Care and Emotional Nurturing. . .
and Recent Transracial Placement Experience

Importance	None N=98 %	One N=39 %	Two or More N=18 %
None	59	41	28
Some	41	59	72
Total	100	100	100

Chi-square = 8.06, 2 df, $p < .02$

Supervisors and administrators were more likely than caseworkers to attach some importance to the timing of the handling of the child's adoptive status.

Table 2-18

Time of the Handling of the Child's Adoptive Status. . .
and Agency Position

Importance	Supervisors/ Administrators N=32 %	Caseworkers N=123 %
None	75	92
Some	25	8
Total	100	100

Chi-square = 7.04, 1 df, $p < .01$

10985

6. Attitudes Toward Race Issues

In the final section, the workers were asked to respond to the same series of statements addressed to the parents in the followup study and to those in the current adoption study. (See Section I.)

As with the response in the first section of the questionnaire dealing with the riskiness of adoption, the strongest consensus related to the importance of helping black children preserve their identity.

	Agreement
It's very important for a black child to develop pride in her/his black heritage	95%
Adoptive parents should allow their black children to wear afros, dashikis, etc., if the children so desire.	88%
Black children adopted by white families should be helped to acquire a feeling of identity with the black community.	87%
Parents should make their black child aware of the contributions of such black leaders as Stokely Carmichael, Malcolm X and Eldridge Cleaver.	83%
It is essential that white families who adopt transracially have or acquire black friends.	74%

Support of transracial adoption was seen in 70% agreement with the statement that "if economically secure, a black family is as capable of rearing a white child as a white family is of rearing a black child," and 79% disagreement with "only a black family can transmit all those ingredients essential for a black child's survival in our society."

On the other hand, awareness of the complexity of the issues involved and a degree of ambivalence were reflected in their agreement with:

A black child reared by white parents is likely to have problems in developing a sense of identity. 71%

Blacks who are questioning transracial adoptions have very good reasons for doing so. 62%

Such ambivalence is also reflected in their <u>disagreement</u> with:

White families can give biracial children more advantages than black families can. 90%

A white person who can adopt a nonwhite child has proved that she or he is not racially prejudiced. 83%

The tasks that parents have in rearing a black child are no different from those of parents rearing a white child. 79%

An economically secure white home is better for a racially mixed child than a poor black home. 75%

A black child is sufficiently prepared for adulthood if given love and security by white adoptive parents. 60%

An increase in transracial adoption is one means of altering racism in our society. 52%

Generally, the respondents expressed liberal views on racial issues, as was seen in their strong <u>agreement</u> with:

White students should take courses in black history and black culture. 84%

Our government isn't doing as much as it can to provide opportunities for minority groups. 82%

Blacks are not to blame for the fact that so many of them are poor. 79%

00087

The same views were expressed in their disagreement with the following:

Parents should discourage their black children from dating and/or marrying whites.	93%
There is far too much emphasis today on racial equality.	90%
"Black is beautiful" is a radical political slogan.	90%
The reason so many blacks are on welfare is because they do not know how to manage their lives properly.	90%
Racism is hard to eradicate because it is rooted in human nature.	86%
Today's blacks should take heart from our immigrant groups who got ahead by working hard and by saving.	83%
Most of today's black leaders are "pushy" and overdemanding.	82%
Most of the complaints today about racial inequality are not justified by the facts.	81%
Clubs and organizations should be permitted to restrict membership by color if they so desire.	79%
Blacks and other minority groups expect too great a change in too short a time.	79%
A poor white youth will have as much trouble getting ahead as will a poor black youth.	78%
Many of the black groups today are pushing for too much change too quickly.	76%
Our administration is doing a great deal to equalize opportunities for all races.	72%
America has always been a land of opportunity for those who really want to get ahead.	70%
Racism does not affect my life very much.	66%
Forcing business to accept minority quotas is basically undemocratic.	65%

19888

In .0 years, the antagonism between whites and blacks in the U.S. will be greater. 58%

Variations Within the Sample on Racial Issues

As was noted in Section I, the 35 statements listed were planned to include three submeasures reflecting the importance of "black pride," the importance attached to aspects of the parental role specific to transracial adoption, and the political-social attitudes of the respondents. Satisfactory levels of intercorrelation were found for all three measures. The statements in the "black pride" measure had a median intercorrelation of .364, those in the "parental role" measure had a median of .255, and those in the racial attitudes group had a median of .374.

The three items in the index designed to measure the importance of "black pride" are listed in Table 1-1. Scores were given to each of the respondents by assigning the mean value of the three statements. Since there were five categories of response, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," the range of scores was 1 to 5. As was evident from the frequency distributions on these items, scores on this index were skewed toward the high end of the scale. Thirty percent of the respondents had scores ranging from 1.66 to 3.66, reflecting some disagreement or uncertainty. Fifty-two percent had scores from 3.67 to 4.33, reflecting general agreement with the statements given, and 26% had scores from 4.34 to 5.00, reflecting strong agreement.

The items in the index designed to measure the importance attached to aspects of the parental role specific to rearing a black child are listed in Table 1-2. The values assigned to the second pair of statements in the index were reversed and the mean score for the four statements computed for each respondent. On this index, the scores were skewed toward the lower end of

9989

the scale, indicating that most respondents tended to agree with the first pair of statements and disagree with the second pair. Those with scores ranging from 1.00 to 1.70, minimizing the parental role, constituted 28% of the respondents. Those with scores of 1.71 to 2.20, attaching some importance to the parental role, constituted 37% of the respondents. Those with scores of 2.21 to 3.70 considered the parental role important, at least when compared with other respondents. Since no one had a mean score of 5 or close to it, it is evident that no respondent was totally convinced that a transracial adoption could succeed entirely on the strength of parental love.

The items used in the index reflecting political and social issues are listed in Table 1-3. The items were selected for their relatively strong intercorrelations. A score below 1.70 on this index, indicating a strongly liberal response, included 28% of the respondents. Those with scores of 1.71 to 2.20, who could be categorized as moderate liberals, included 37% of the respondents. The remaining 35%, with scores of 2.21 to 3.71, could be characterized as somewhat conservative, at least when compared with the rest of the sample. As with the preceding index, no one attained the maximum score of 5, indicating that there were no really strong conservatives in the sample.

The analysis indicated considerable internal variation in the response to these measures. The only variables describing the respondents that showed no significant relationship to any of the attitudes reflected in the indices were marital status, professional education, and recent transracial adoption experience.

Workers over 35 had stronger feelings about the importance of the parental role than did those under 35.

Table 2-19

Importance of Parental Role and
Age of Worker

Importance	Under 35 N=70 %	35 and Over N=85 %
Low	46	40
Moderate	40	26
High	14	34
Total	100	100

Chi-square = 8.67, 2 df, $p < .01$

Since the political and social issues described in the index were all related to race, it is not surprising that the nonwhite workers fell into the "strongly liberal" category on this measure more frequently than white workers.

Table 2-20

Political-Social Attitudes and
Race of Worker

	White N=134 %	Nonwhite N=21 %
Strongly liberal	24	48
Moderately liberal	37	43
Somewhat conservative	39	9
Total	100	100

Chi-square = 8.19, 2 df, $p < .02$

Workers with more social work experience were more likely than others to attach importance to the parental role and were more inclined to hold relatively conservative political-social views. Both relationships are stronger than those with age, noted earlier.

Table 2-21

Importance of Parental Role and Social Work Experience

Importance	Under 5 Years N=35 %	5-9 Years N=50 %	10 or More Years N=70 %
Low	49	48	36
Moderate	31	40	27
High	20	12	37
Total	100	100	100

Chi-square = 10.63, 4 df, $p < .03$

Workers with fewer than 5 years of social work experience and those with fewer than 3 years of adoption experience were more likely to be classified as "strongly liberal" than were those with more experience.

10092

Table 2-22

Political-Social Attitudes and Adoption Experience

	Under 3 Years N=57 %	3 Years or More N=98 %
Strongly liberal	41	21
Moderately liberal/ conservative	59	79
Total	100	100

Chi-square = 6.19, 2 df, $p < .02$

Workers with experience in transracial placement stressed the importance of "black pride" more often than did those who had made none.

Table 2-23

"Black Pride" and Experience With Transracial Placement

	None N=46 %	One or More N=109 %
Disagree/uncertain	33	18
Agree	52	52
Strongly agree	15	30
Total	100	100

Chi-square = 6.24, 2 df, $p < .05$

10693

With respect to the importance of special aspects of the parental role, the commonest response of the supervisors and administrators was "moderate," while that of the caseworkers was "low."

Table 2-24

Importance of Parental Role and Agency Position

Importance	Administrators/ Supervisors N=32 %	Caseworkers N=123 %
Low	37	44
Moderate	50	28
High	13	28
Total	100	100

Chi-square = 6.75, 2 df, $p < .04$

Workers in the Los Angeles agency attached less importance to black pride and more to the parental role than did others and were also more likely to express somewhat conservative views.

Table 2-25

"Black Pride," "Parental Role," "Political-Social Attitudes". . . and Place of Employment

"Black Pride"	Los Angeles N=93 %	All Others N=62 %
Disagree/uncertain	31	8
Agreement	52	53
Strong agreement	17	39
Total	100	100

Chi-square = 15.75, 2 df, $p < .001$

"Parental Role"		
Low importance	36	53
Moderate importance	32	32
High importance	32	15
Total	100	100

Chi-square = 7.40, 2 df, $p < .03$

"Political-Social Attitudes"		
Strongly liberal	28	28
Moderately liberal	30	48
Conservative	42	24
Total	100	100

Chi-square = 6.69, 2 df, $p < .04$

7. Summary and Implications

Summary

One hundred and fifty-five adoption workers from six agencies responded to an attitude questionnaire focused on transracial adoption and related issues. These workers were usually white females, the majority of whom held a master's degree in social work, had over 5 years of social work experience, more than 3 years in the adoption field, and had made at least one transracial placement. The majority were employed by a single large public agency, but the analysis indicated that this group did not differ significantly from the other respondents in their demographic characteristics.

In general, respondents agreed that transracial adoption was an acceptable practice and a better alternative for black children than indeterminate long-term foster care. On the other hand, they agreed that such adoptions are risky, requiring more exploration than inracial adoptions and making heavier demands on the adoptive parents. They were unanimous that the black child's identification with his heritage must be maintained even if he lives with a white family. Respondents thought it would take longer for an adoptive couple to feel that a black infant was theirs than a white infant, but except for infants they considered age a stronger deterrent to a sense of belonging than race.

Respondents were unanimous in agreeing that capacity for parenting, along with marital adjustment and emotional stability, were the most important characteristics to be considered in evaluating the eligibility of couples for adoption. They were also likely to consider as "very important" feelings about problems associated with adoption: infertility, illegitimacy, inherited traits, and the relinquishment of children by biological parents. Social and environmental

factors such as the extended family, neighbors, work adjustment, housing, income, etc., were usually rated as "moderately important." Most respondents gave these characteristics the same rank order for white and black inracial adoptions as for transracial adoptions, with the exception of contact with minority group members, considered "very important" only in transracial adoption.

When asked to choose from a list the three most important topics for discussion with adoptive applicants, respondents again indicated they did not differentiate between inracial and transracial adoption, selecting the same topics as "most important" for all forms of adoption. These were "problems specific to the behavior and personality of this child," "handling the child's questions about the biological parents," and "physical care and emotional nurturing of the child."

In the area of general racial and social issues, respondents tended to take a liberal position, strongly supportive of the position of blacks in American society.

Although there was strong general consensus among the respondents, some variations were seen in relation to all of the descriptive characteristics of the workers in the sample, some expected and some rather unexpected, but none demonstrating exceptionally strong patterns.

Differences were associated with marital status, age, length of social work experience, length of adoption experience, length and recency of transracial adoption experience, agency position, and geographic area. Some differences were associated with race, but these deserve little attention because of the small number of nonwhite workers in the study. On none of the areas covered by the questionnaire did responses vary with education.

10097

Single workers were more likely to attach some importance to the reaction of neighbors as a topic for discussion with prospective adoptive parents than were married workers, while the latter attached relatively more importance to "changes to anticipate in caring for the child" than did single respondents.

With respect to age, the one difference was the greater emphasis placed by workers over 35 on the importance attached to the parental role in transracial adoption.

Workers with greater social work experience attached more importance to economic and social factors in evaluating adoptive applicants than did less experienced workers. On the other hand workers with long experience rated the handling of the child's questions about biological parents as an all-important topic for discussion less often than did other workers. Workers with the least adoption experience and those with the most tended to attach greater importance to the psychological factors in adoption than did those with moderate experience. The same pattern was seen in relation to the importance attached to the reactions of relatives and friends. On the other hand, the most experienced adoption workers did not emphasize "the problems specific to the behavior of the child" as much as did the less experienced. The least experienced adoption workers were more likely to be categorized as "strongly liberal" in their political-social attitudes than were the more experienced workers.

Workers who had made only one transracial placement were more likely to feel that such adoptions involved little risk than either those workers who had made none or those who had made two or more. Workers with little experience in transracial adoption attached relatively more importance to the reactions of neighbors than did the relatively experienced. Workers with experience in transracial adoption stressed the importance of "black pride" more often than did those who had no experience. Workers who had the most

experience with transracial placement tended to be more optimistic about the time that adoptive parents needed to feel that a black infant or toddler was their own, but they showed a similar optimism in relation to white children.

Workers with recent experience in transracial adoption were more likely to attach importance to "physical care and emotional nurture" of the child as a topic of discussion than were those with less recent experience.

Supervisors and administrators were more likely to attach some importance to the timing of the handling of the child's adoptive status than were caseworkers. With respect to the importance of special aspects of the parental role, the commonest response of the supervisors and administrators was "moderate importance" while that of the caseworkers was "low importance."

Workers in the Los Angeles agency were more likely to view transracial adoption as risky than were workers with other agencies. They were also markedly more pessimistic about the time needed for parents to feel that a black adopted child was theirs regardless of age, but nearly the same degree of pessimism was seen in relation to white children. They also attached less importance to psychological factors in establishing eligibility for adoption, but this difference, too, was seen in relation to inracial as well as transracial adoption. They attached less importance to "black pride" and more to the parental role than did other workers and were also more likely to express somewhat conservative political-social views than others in the sample.

Discussion

Although these findings are, for the reasons noted earlier, by no means definitive, several of them are

thought-provoking. The respondents showed clear agreement that transracial adoption constituted an acceptable practice, a better alternative than a childhood spent in foster care. At the same time, the position these workers took is strongly qualified; it is agreed that transracial adoption is risky, that the practice warrants more exploration than conventional inracial adoption, that the demands it makes on adoptive parents are heavier than most. Furthermore, there is little belief that there is anything inherently superior in the white community's capacities for rearing children, even on an economic level.

The practice emerges, then, as a seemingly temporary, partial solution to the racial imbalance prevalent on the adoption scene. It is not surprising, therefore, that a practice supported by a relatively low level of conviction should diminish at the first strong attack, as was apparently the case after the National Association of Black Social Workers issued its statement that transracial adoption threatens the black family. If the views expressed in this survey are at all representative, the adoption workers' own reservations about placing black children with white families suggest that there is little threat to the black family.

Some of the ambivalence surrounding this practice is reflected not only in the general direction of the response, but in the relationship noted between experience with transracial placement and the workers' assessment of the degree of risk involved. Workers who had made no transracial placements themselves viewed the practice with caution and judged it to be at least moderately risky. Workers who had made only one placement, who had in effect immersed one toe in the cold water, had apparently discovered the positive aspects of such placements so that their fear of the risks involved was diminished. Workers with a broader range of experience, who had made two or more placements, saw a greater degree of risk than those who

130

had made only one, but not so much as those workers with no experience at all.

A linear response, i.e., the more experience the greater the risk felt by the worker, would have been a clear indication that the practice of transracial adoption is regarded by social workers as a dubious one. The opposite response--the more experienced, the less risk perceived by the workers--would have supported the practice by suggesting that the problems involved lay with the workers' inexperience and would diminish with increased familiarity. Unfortunately, the findings do not point clearly in either direction.

The workers' response to many of the questions carry serious implications for their relations with potential adoptive parents. In effect, the workers are indicating that applicants interested in a transracial adoption should receive no concessions in the form of less-demanding eligibility procedures. On the contrary, their motivation must be explored more thoroughly than most. Furthermore, they are expected to take the same risks as all other adoptive parents: they may be given a child who is physically, emotionally or intellectually handicapped, as well as racially different.

Responses such as these may be explained as "child-oriented." Workers on the contemporary adoption scene are appropriately concerned with finding a good home for a child, not with finding a child acceptable to adoptive parents. The agencies they represent must recruit homes for these children, but applicants interested in adopting children of another race may be deterred by the expectation that they will be even more thoroughly investigated than most adoptive parents and will be expected to take the same risks. Such attitudes reinforce the expectation of many prospective adoptive parents that the evaluation process will be a demanding one. On a more positive note, it is noteworthy that most workers ranked socio-economic

10101

factors as of only moderate importance in determining eligibility. This tends to support the contention of many adoption agencies that they do not emphasize material considerations and are open to applicants of modest means.

Another aspect of the findings is also worth noting: experience with transracial adoption affected some attitudes toward inracial adoption. This may simply indicate that transracial placements are not made in isolation. The same workers are likely to have placed other "waiting" children--including older children and those who have physical or mental handicaps. It seems likely that the greater range of adoption experience gives workers a different perspective than does experience based solely on the more conventional inracial infant adoption. This suggests that research focused more broadly on the impact of changes in adoption practice on the workers involved may have strong implications for practice.

The findings indicating that the least experienced workers responded like the most experienced, while the moderately experienced differed from the others, are instructive. They suggest that the least experienced workers are the ones most likely to accept the views of the most experienced, who, in this instance, include most of the supervisors and administrators in the study, while the moderately experienced are somewhat more emancipated from supervision and freer to develop views of their own. They also suggest that the moderately experienced may be the least likely to accept agency direction and are perhaps more open to experimentation

Finally, the fact that one large agency gave evidence of clearly different attitudes in several areas is evidence of the existence of agency subcultures. The social work profession, with its heavy emphasis on individual worker-client relationships, has seemed to operate on the assumption that what transpires in

0042

these relationships is entirely dependent on the skill of the professional staff. In more recent years, interest in organization theories has made some inroads into this way of thinking. Evidence that workers interact within an agency, producing views and attitudes different from those they might have held had they been employed elsewhere, reinforces the view that adoption practice varies widely from setting to setting. As such interaction is subtle, those involved may not themselves be aware that their attitudes may differ in any way from those of the rest of the field. The children and the adoptive parents experience the effect of these differences. Thus, a child may have one type of experience if placed in one kind of agency atmosphere and a child with similar characteristics may have a different experience in another. Some prospective adoptive parents apply to an agency with a subculture compatible with their interests. Other adoptive parents with similar attributes may by chance apply to one that is not compatible, and have a totally different experience. Further recognition of such variations in practice and efforts to control them might reduce some of the capriciousness that now seems to characterize much of adoption practice.

None of these observations is meant to imply that workers' attitudes are the sole determining factor in agency practice, but they are certainly an important feature in determining the implementation of policies and their effect on those to whom they apply.

1 0 1 0 3